THE SKULL MAN
5
Kazuhiko Shimamoto
Shotaro Ishinomori

Brought within an inch of his life by Cobra Man in their last clash, the Skull Man has been nursed back to health by the Queen Wasp, who may fancy our undead hero a little more than she's let on in the past. She may also have second thoughts about being part of Rasputin's Syndicate. The situation pits our hero in the middle of an internal war that may bring the entire organization to its knees. And with the Chameleon King enamored with the Queen, Rasputin's foot soldiers are rapidly dwindling in number. Of course, Rasputin also wants the Queen for himself. To maintain order, Rasputin is forced to send in his best henchman, a ghost from the Skull Man's past, Goro Ayase, the Scorpion.

THE SKULL MAN

The Story So Far...

Fearing that the genetic research being undertaken by his son and daughter-in-law posed a danger to humanity, Toratsuki Chisato murdered them and destroyed their lab, intending to raise their two children Ryusei and Maya in an environment free from the evils of that science. However Garo, a mutagenetic creature that became a childhood companion to the young Ryusei, rescued the frightened toddler from the attack. As a young man, Ryusei set out to avenge his parents' murder, an obsession that turned him into the kind of murderer he longed to destroy. Many innocent people died in the wake of his vengeance.

After years of searching, he catches up with the killer only to learn that it's his own grandfather. Toratsuki would rather he and his legacy perish than expose the world to the mysterious powers possessed by Ryusei and his sister, so he engineers a trap to kill all three of them. But the children lived and transcended to whatever state of being exists between mortality and divinity. Now, freed of crippling vengeance and guided by his pacifist sister, Ryusei Chisato, a.k.a. the Skull Man, has committed himself to protecting humanity. But his past may still haunt him.

Recently, armies of mutated humans have swarmed Tokyo in what appears to be a coordinated effort by a group called the Syndicate to subdue humankind. And the Skull Man may be the only one that stands in their way. However, his list of allies is growing - already his sister Maya and Garo man their secret compound high in the mountains; Maria, another supernatural being, has become disillusioned with the Syndicate and may join the Skull Man's ranks; and Detective Hioka, originally committed to bringing down the mass murderer the Skull Man, has begun to realize that there is a much bigger threat looming on the horizon. Among the Skull Man's adversaries: Rasputin, the leader of the Syndicate who may have links to Ryusei's parents; the Queen Wasp, the leader of a legion of female warriors currently experimenting with mind control serums; Mr. Goshiki, the boss of the Chameleon army; the Cobra Man, in charge of a brute squad of snake men; and Ayase Goro, the Scorpion... and Ryusei's former schoolmate.

The Skull Man

Vol. 5

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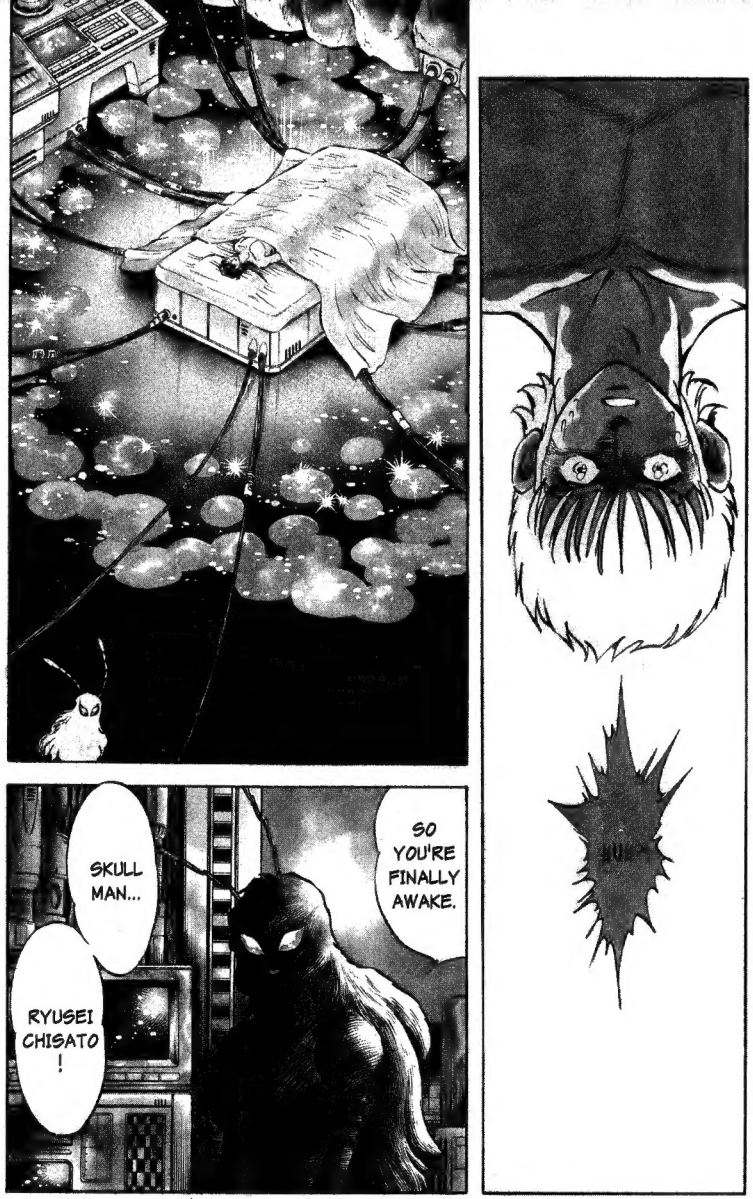
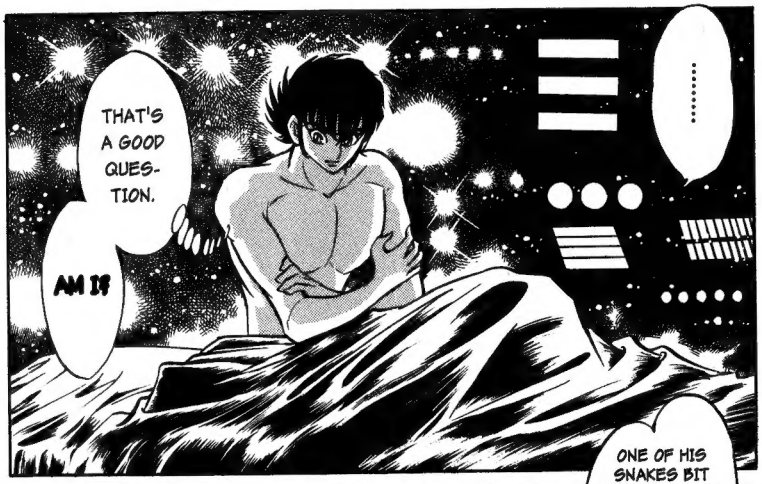
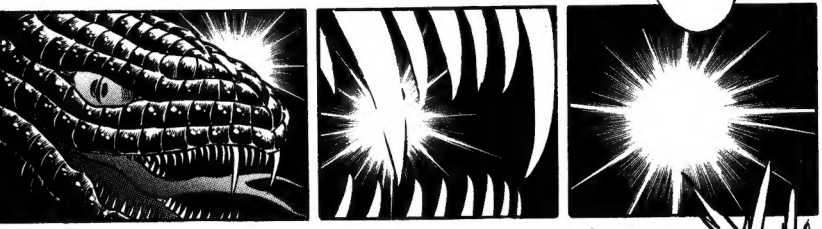
YA AAGGGHH!
AAHHGH!

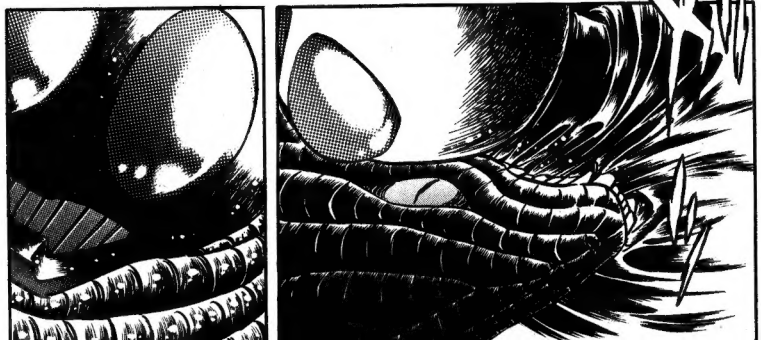
YAAA
GGAG
GG

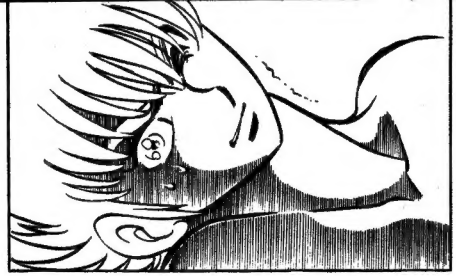

SO YOU'RE FINALLY AWAKE.
SKULL MAN...
RYUSEI CHISATO !

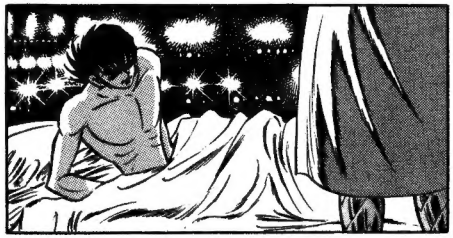

THAT'S A GOOD QUES-TION.
AM I?
.....

ONE OF HIS SNAKES BIT ME. WHEN THE VENOM STARTED TO TAKE EFFECT, I WAS AS GOOD AS DEAD!



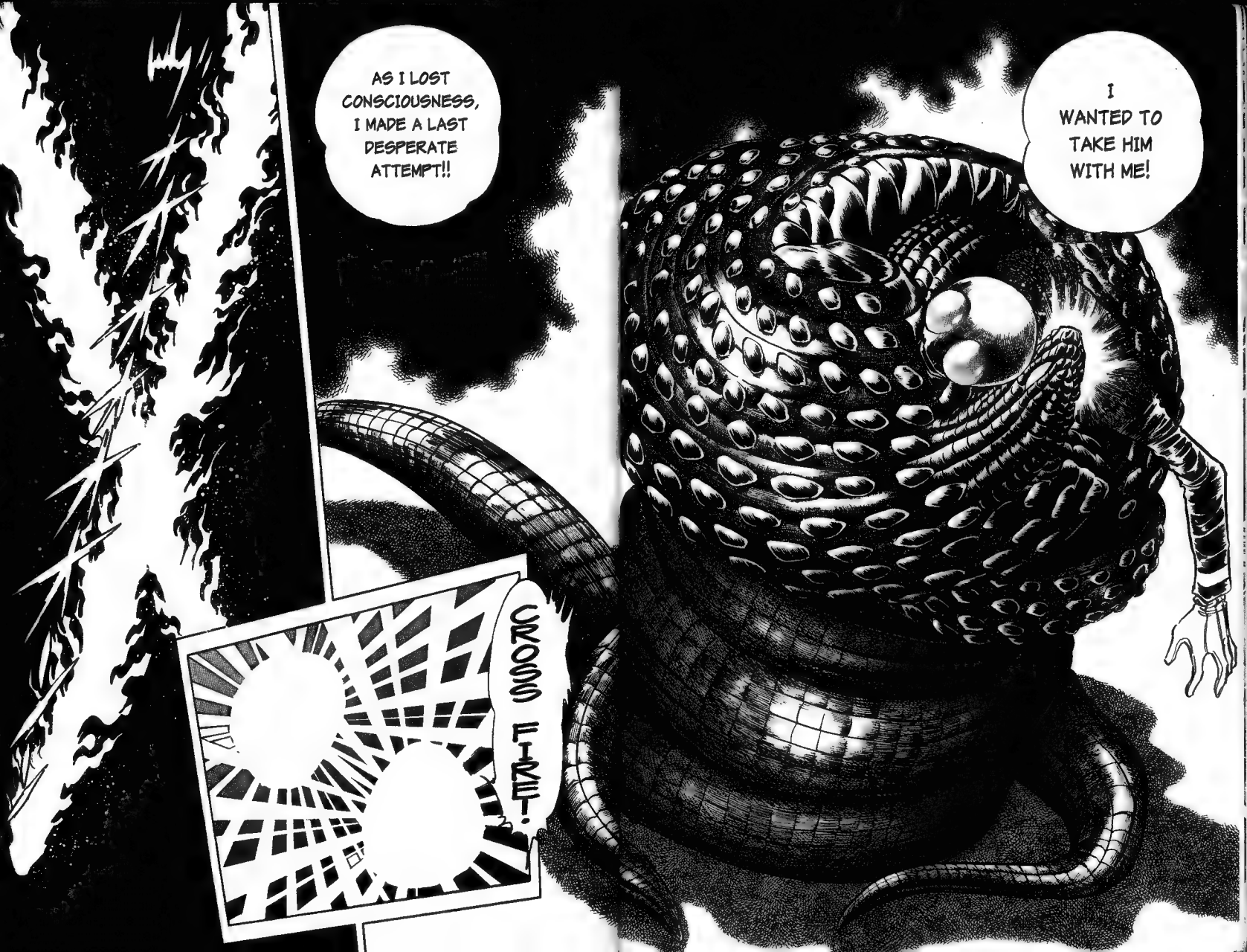






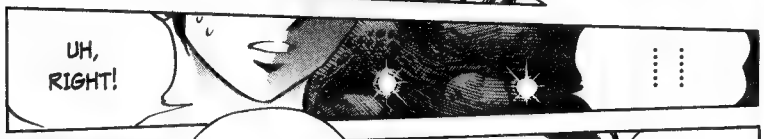
HOW ARE YOU?
YOU AREN'T FULLY RECOVERED YET...
...BUT ARE YOU WELL ENOUGH TO GET UP?

QU...
QUEEN WASP?!
RIGHT.
I'M TOUCHED YOU REMEM-BER ME.
DEAR RYUSEI ...
WHAT A SURPRISE TO FIND THAT THE REAL FACE UNDER SKULL MAN'S HAUNTING MASK IS SUCH A PRETTY YOUNG BOY.


AS I LOST CONSCIOUSNESS, I MADE A LAST DESPERATE ATTEMPT!!
CROSS FIRE!
I WANTED TO TAKE HIM WITH ME!

IT'S QUITE FASCINATING. SOMETHING CAUSES YOU TO DO THIS AUTOMATICALLY.
WHEN YOUR LIFE IS IN PERIL, YOU REACT WITH AN INCREDIBLE BURST OF PSYCHIC ENERGY.
BUT IT DANGEROUSLY STRAINS YOUR BODY.

FOR NOW, IT HAS SAVED YOUR LIFE.
YOU ARE GOING TO HAVE TO CONTROL IT, OR IT MIGHT KILL YOU ONE DAY!


UH, RIGHT!
. . . .

MY, HOW CYNICAL YOU ARE!
WHY DID YOU SAVE ME?

DON'T YOU BELIEVE IN ACTS OF RANDOM KINDNESS?

IT DIDN'T HURT THAT YOU BOTH HAVE SIMILAR POWERS.
WHEN SHE FOUGHT AGAINST YOU SO... INTIMATELY, A PART OF HER PSYCHE BECAME LINKED WITH YOURS.
AND EVER SINCE YOUR PAS DE DEUX, SHE'S BEEN LIKE A TWIN SISTER.
SO...
...RIGHT ABOUT NOW, YOU'RE WONDERING...
...HOW I KNOW ALL THIS!

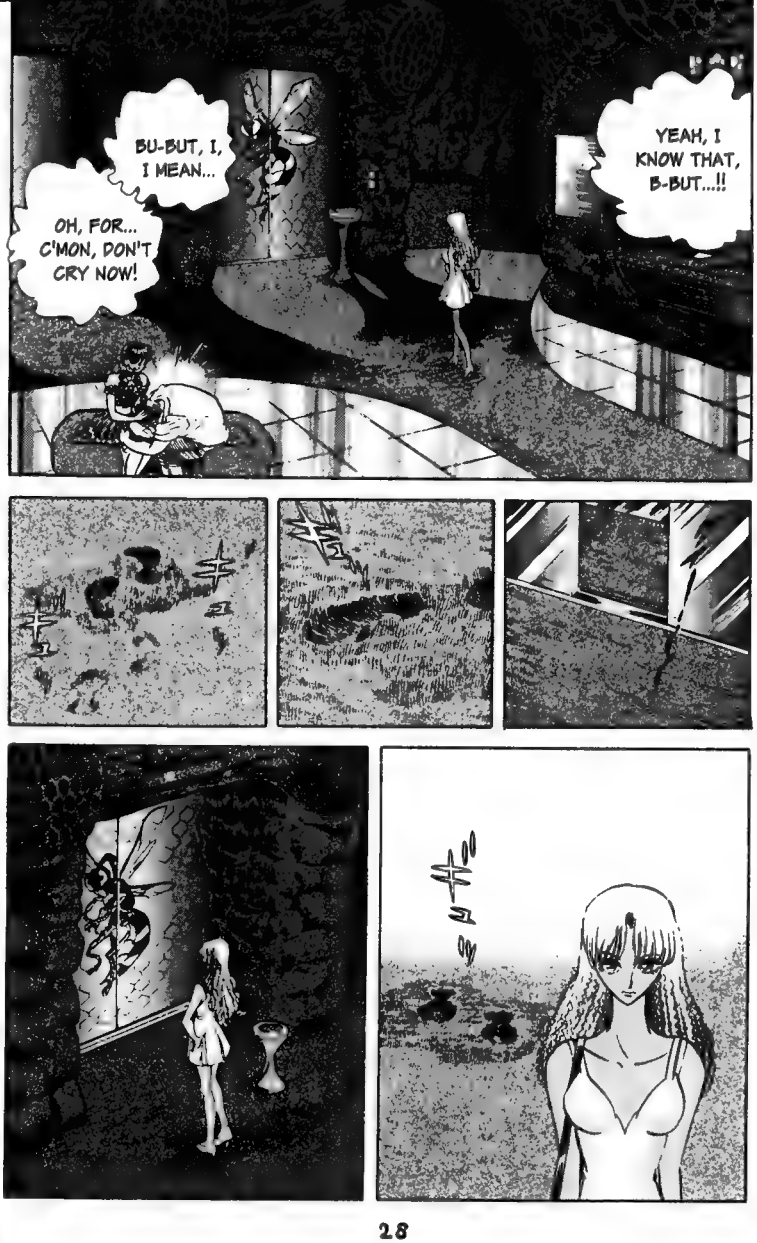
PERHAPS YOU EXPECTED THAT MARIA WOULD COME TO YOUR RESCUE?
PERHAPS YOU WERE YOU SO RECKLESS BECAUSE YOU COUNTED ON HER AID?

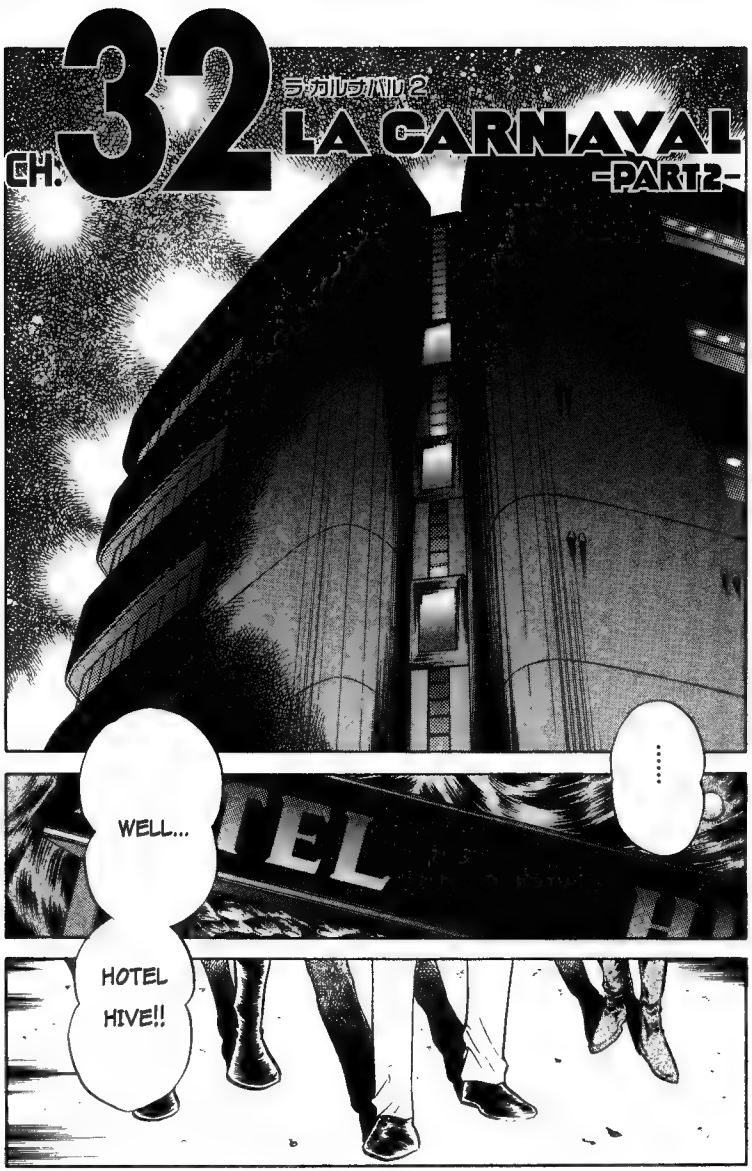
I CAN'T KILL SOMEONE WHO'S NOW A PART OF ME.
THAT WOULD BE LIKE MURDERING MYSELF.
AND VICE VERSA, HUH?
I SEE.
BUT I THOUGHT YOU WANTED TO KILL ME?
IN OUR LITTLE CLASH, YOU INVADED MY PSYCHE, AS WELL.
SO I'M BEGINNING TO UNDERSTAND YOU MORE.

RYUSEI ...
...FORGET ABOUT MARIA!
FROM NOW ON, I'LL BE THE ONE WHO PROTECTS YOU!

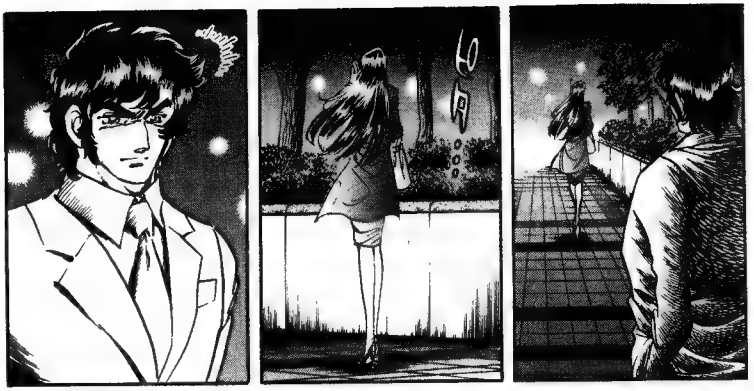
WHY?
WHY'D SHE SAVE HIM?
I DIDN'T GIVE YOU THAT INFORMATION SO THAT BITCH COULD SAVE HIM.
SHUT UP!!
CALM DOWN!
THE QUEEN'S TAKEN AN INTEREST IN HIM.
YOU'RE CRAZY!!
WHEN SHE FOUGHT HIM, SOMETHING MUST HAVE OVERWHELMED HER SENSES.
BEINGS MORE POWERFUL THAN HERSELF TICKLE HER ROMANTIC FASCINATION.
SHE CAN'T HELP IT.
FULLY. HOWEVER, MY QUEEN DOESN'T FEEL THE SAME WAY ABOUT HIM.
DOESN'T SHE KNOW HOW MY BOSS FEELS ABOUT HER?
DOESN'T YOUR QUEEN UNDERSTAND?

NEED I REMIND YOU CRETINS THAT YOU ARE NOT ALLOWED TO SNEAK INTO THE HIVE?!
WE'RE GETTING TIRED OF THESE STALKER TACTICS!
ONE OF YOU CHAMELEON GROUP GUYS?
WHO'S THERE?
UH!
O- OH!
LOOK WHO'S HERE.
IT'S BOSS BUG-EYE HIMSELF, MR. GOSHIKI.


BU-BUT, I, I MEAN...
OH, FOR... C'MON, DON'T CRY NOW!
YEAH, I KNOW THAT, B-BUT...!!

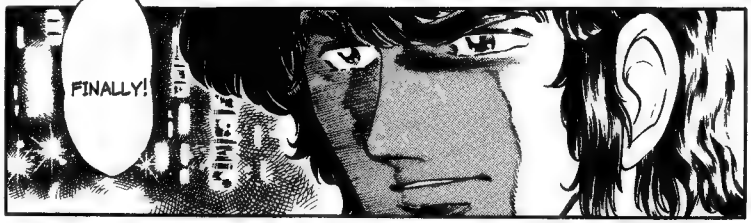

CH. 32
ラ・カルナバル2
LA CARNAVAL
-PART2-
.....
WELL...
HOTEL HIVE!!

WHERE ARE THE QUEEN'S PRIVATE CHAMBERS?!
AND DON'T LIE TO ME.
I KNOW SHE'S HIDING THE SKULL MAN HERE AND I WANT HIM NOW!!
UNGHH...


SOME-
THING'S
NOT
RIGHT.
WHO IS
SHE...
A WOMAN
TALKING
ON HER
CELL
PHONE...
WHO'S
THAT?

NO!
NO...

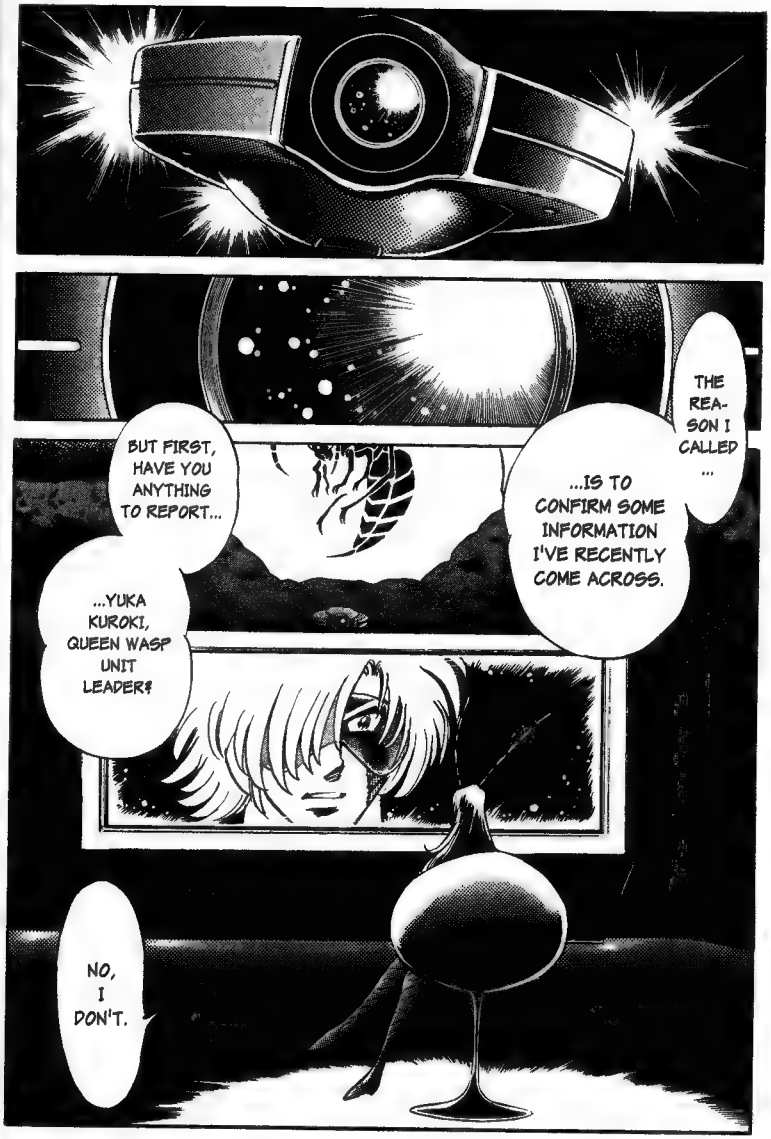
IT
REEKS
FROM A
MILE
AWAY.
SHE'S EVEN
SLAPPED HER
CALLING CARD
RIGHT ON THE
MARQUEE! WELL,
AT LEAST WE KNOW
SHE AIN'T SHY.
HOW THE
HELL COULD
WE HAVE
MISSED THIS!
BUT NOW
WE CAN
MOVE IN.


FINALLY!

DAMN
SOME-
THING'S
GOING
DOWN...
RIGHT
NOW!!

WATCH OUT!!
WHAT THE HELL D'YA THINK YER...
POLICE
OH... SHIT ...
UH, ME?
DID... DID I DO SUMTHIN' WRONG ...
OFFICER?
NO, BUT...

I'VE BEEN MONITORING THE WASP WOMAN'S MOVEMENTS FOR SOME TIME.
SHE ALWAYS COMES TO THIS HIGH-CLASS NEIGHBORHOOD, PICKS UP SOME KIND OF PACKAGE.
BUT THEN I ALWAYS LOSE HER RIGHT AROUND HERE.
I KNEW HER HIDEOUT HAD TO BE NEARBY.
AND NOW...
WE'VE FOUND IT!

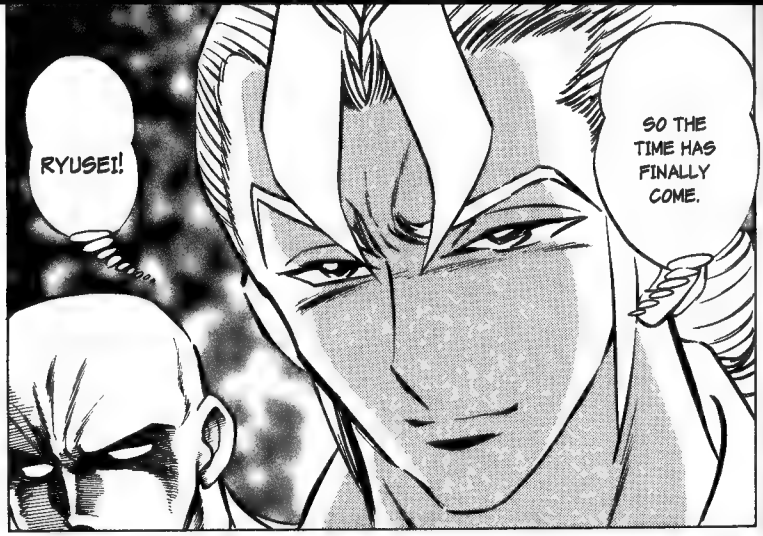

THE REA-SON I CALLED ...
...IS TO CONFIRM SOME INFORMATION I'VE RECENTLY COME ACROSS.
BUT FIRST, HAVE YOU ANYTHING TO REPORT...
...YUKA KUROKI, QUEEN WASP UNIT LEADER?
NO, I DON'T.

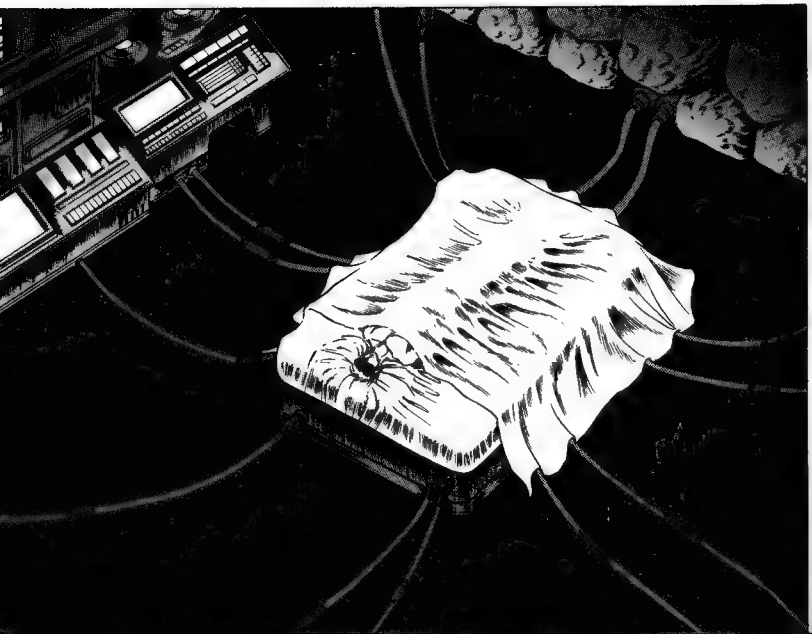
I SEE.
WELL, I JUST HEARD THAT A VERY BADLY INJURED MAN WAS TAKEN INTO YOUR HIVE. OF COURSE, I COULDN'T HELP BUT BE CURIOUS.
THAT'S A PRIVATE MATTER, SO I'M NOT OBLIGATED TO DISCUSS IT WITH YOU.
NO, IT'S NOT A 'PRIVATE MATTER'!
I'M SURE YOU'RE AWARE THAT THIS MAN HAS BEEN CAUSING MAJOR DISTRESS TO THIS ORGANIZATION.

UGH. HOW UTTERLY TASTE-LESS.
.....
MASTER RASPUTIN, YOU, TOO, SEEM MORE IRRITABLE THAN I'VE FOUND YOU IN PREVIOUS COMMUNIQUES.
PERHAPS YOU FEAR THAT THIS MAN HAS SOMETHING THAT YOU YOURSELF LACK.
...
I SEE. VERY WELL.

I'VE NOT RECEIVED ANY OFFICIAL ORDERS OR DIRECTIONS REGARDING THIS MATTER.

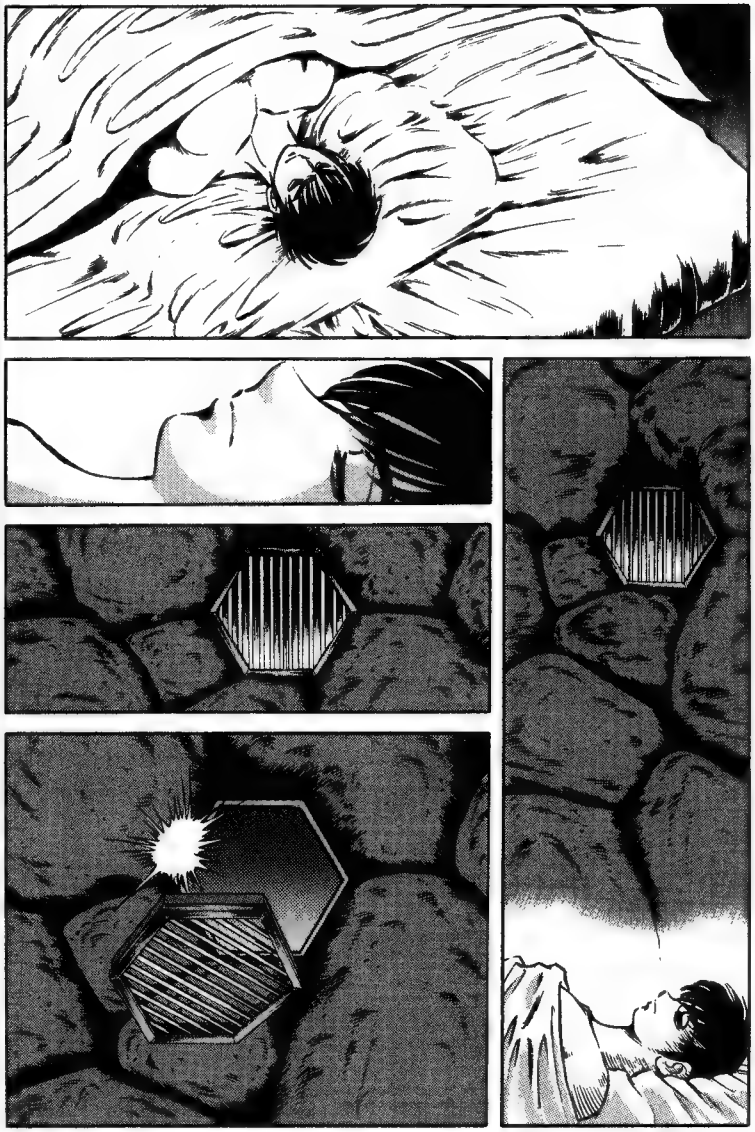
OH? PLAYING GAMES, ARE WE, MY QUEEN?
YOU SEEM A BIT TESTIER THAN USUAL TODAY.
HEH HEH HEH. PERHAPS A STRONG, SUPPORTIVE MAN CAN EASE AND SOOTH THOSE FRAYED NERVES?

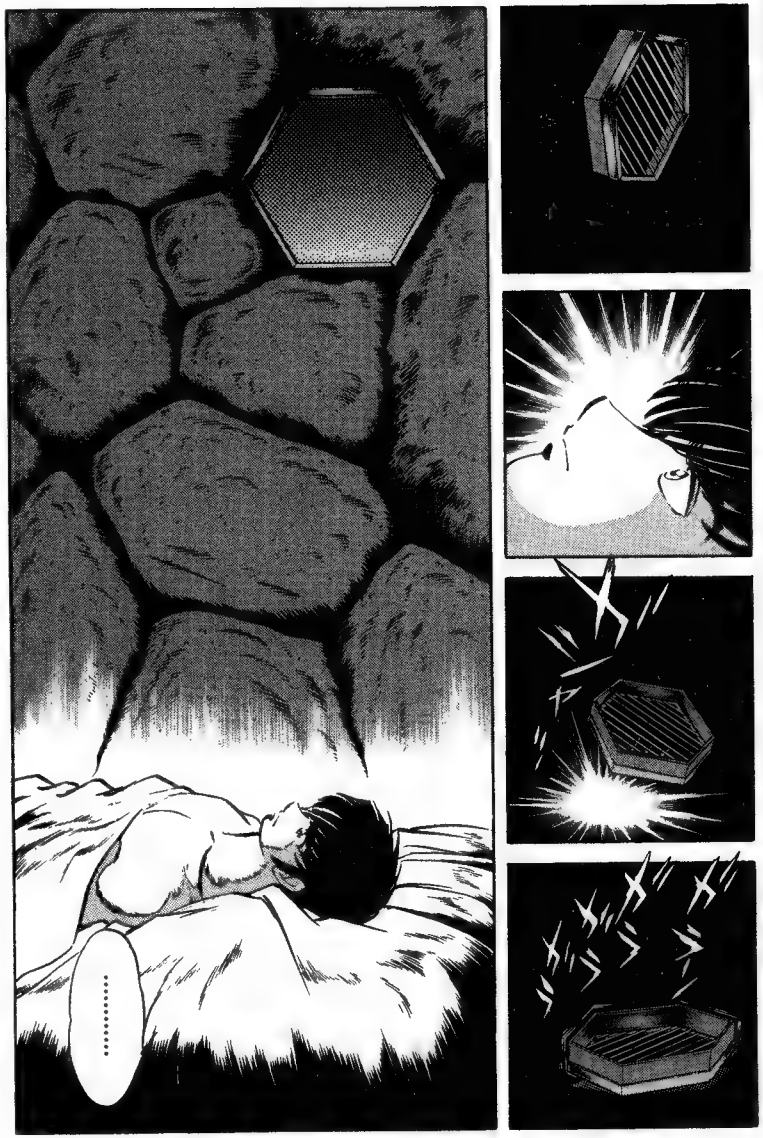

RYUSEI!
SO THE TIME HAS FINALLY COME.



AYASE ...
THE SKULL MAN IS AT THE HIVE IN SHIBUYA. PROCEED THERE IMMEDIATELY.

YOUR JOB IS TO MAKE SURE HE DOES NOT LEAVE THAT BUILDING ALIVE!
AND ENOUGH OF THIS CAT AND MOUSE GAME.





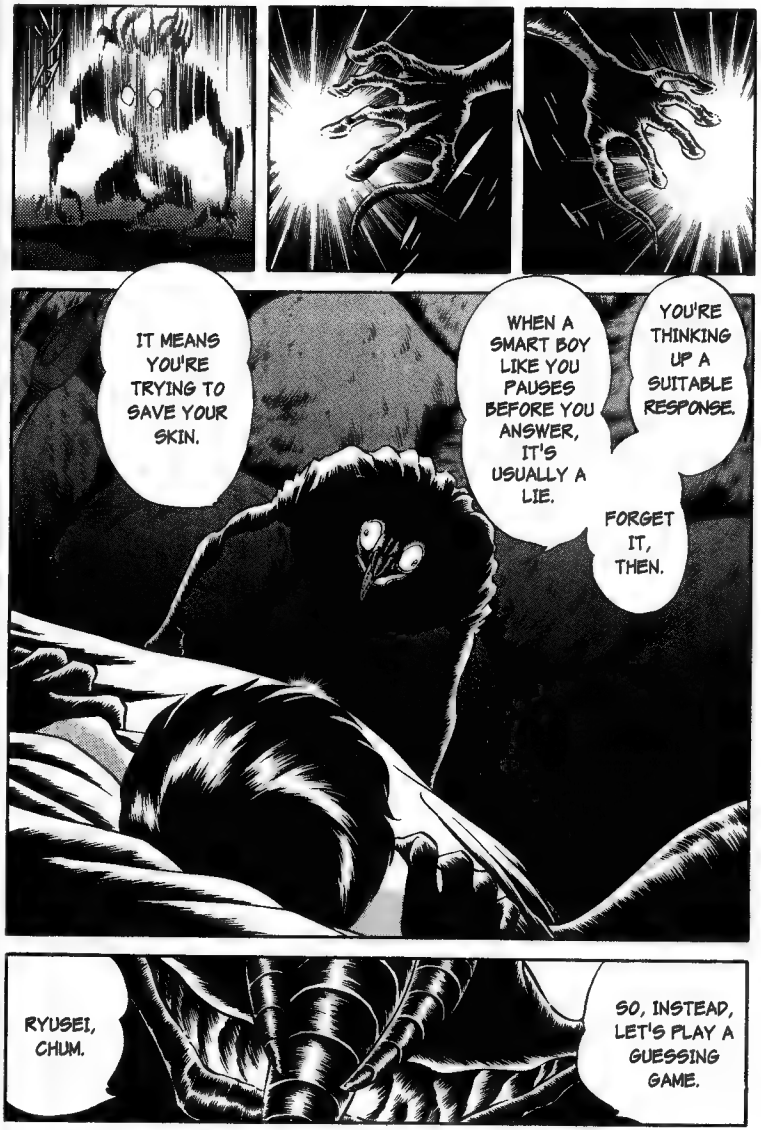
NGGG ...!!
WHA...!

W- WHAT?
WHO... WHO ARE YOU?

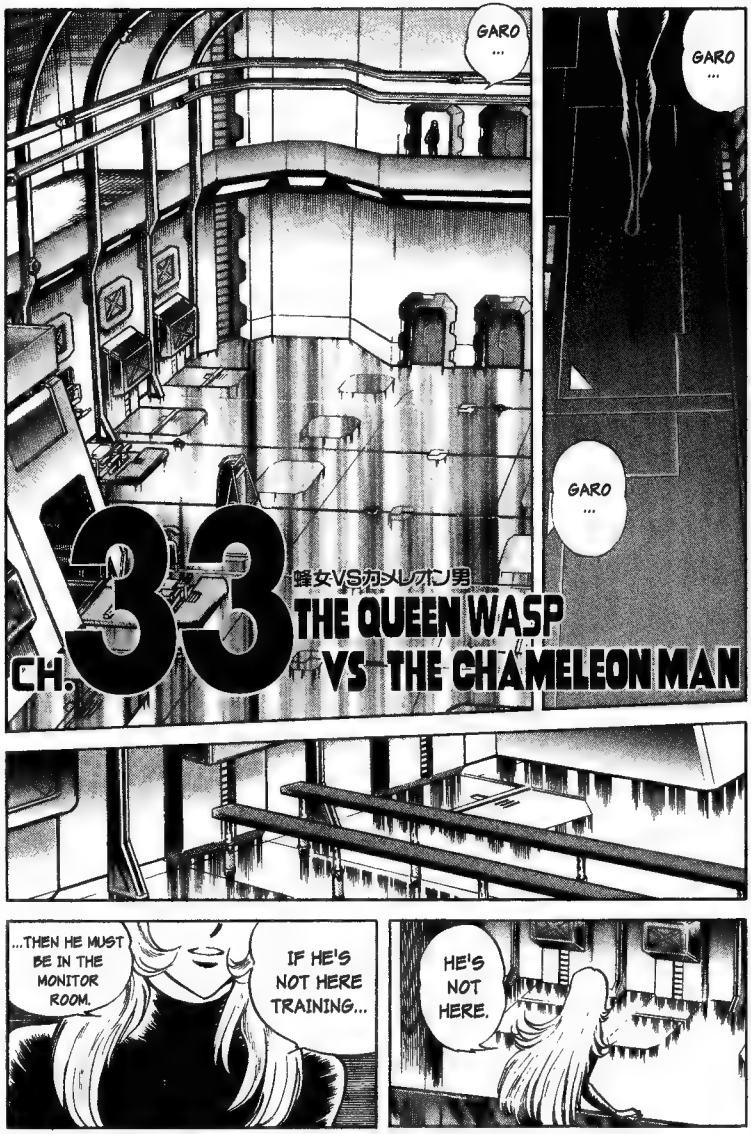
WH-WHO ARE YOU?
I'M ASKING THE QUESTIONS HERE!
IT DOESN'T MATTER WHO I AM!
WHY DID YOU REALLY FIGHT THE QUEEN WASP?
TELL ME!!
WHY IS THAT?!
BUT THERE'S NOT ONE MARK ON HER BODY.
I KNOW YOU'VE FOUGHT THE QUEEN BEFORE.
UHH!

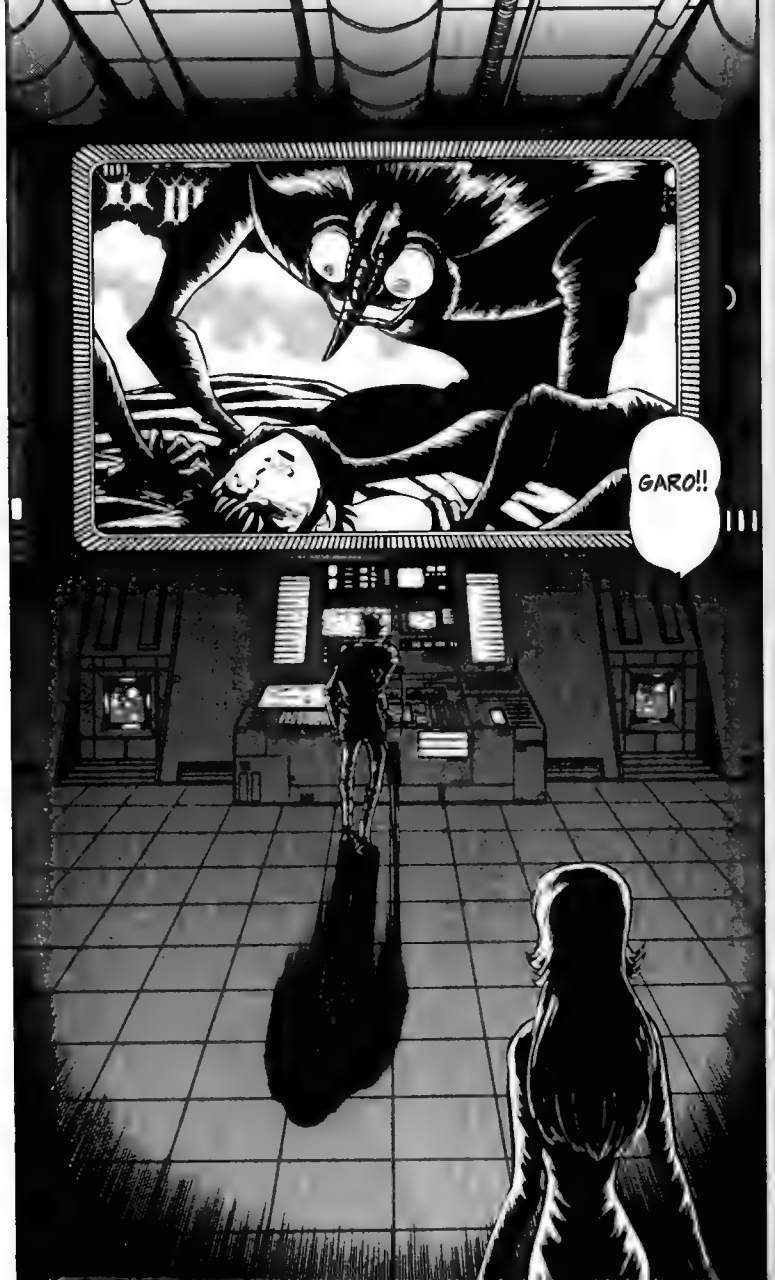
TELL ME, RYUSEI CHISATO!
WHY HAS THE QUEEN WASP SAVED YOU, AND HIDDEN YOU HERE?

A MAN AND A WOMAN ARE STRANDED ON A DESERTED ISLAND, NO HOPE OF RESCUE, THEY MUST LEARN TO SURVIVE.
NOW, WHAT HAPPENS?
THE ANSWER:
THEY GET TOGETHER.
OF COURSE! THAT'S NATURAL!
NOW THEN,
WHAT IF IT WAS ONE WOMAN AND TWO MEN?
THE ANSWER:
THE WOMAN PICKS ONE OF THE MEN...
...AND REJECTS THE OTHER.
ONE IS CHOSEN... AND THE OTHER REJECTED, CONDEMNED TO A LIFE OF SOLITUDE AT THE WHIM OF A WOMAN.
IS THAT JUST?
OF COURSE NOT! HOW CAN IT BE?
RYUSEI, MY MAN?
SO, HOW CAN JUSTICE PREVAIL?
THE ANSWER:
BEFORE THE WOMAN CAN MAKE HER CHOICE, THE MEN FIGHT EACH OTHER.
AND THAT'S NATURAL! THE SUPERIOR MAN WINS THE WOMAN! THAT'S THE PROPER WAY TO DO IT, DON'T YOU THINK?


YOU'RE THINKING UP A SUITABLE RESPONSE.
WHEN A SMART BOY LIKE YOU PAUSES BEFORE YOU ANSWER, IT'S USUALLY A LIE.
FORGET IT, THEN.
IT MEANS YOU'RE TRYING TO SAVE YOUR SKIN.
SO, INSTEAD, LET'S PLAY A GUESSING GAME.
RYUSEI, CHUM.

THAT'S WHY I'M GOING TO KILL YOU!!
RYUSEI, OLD PAL.

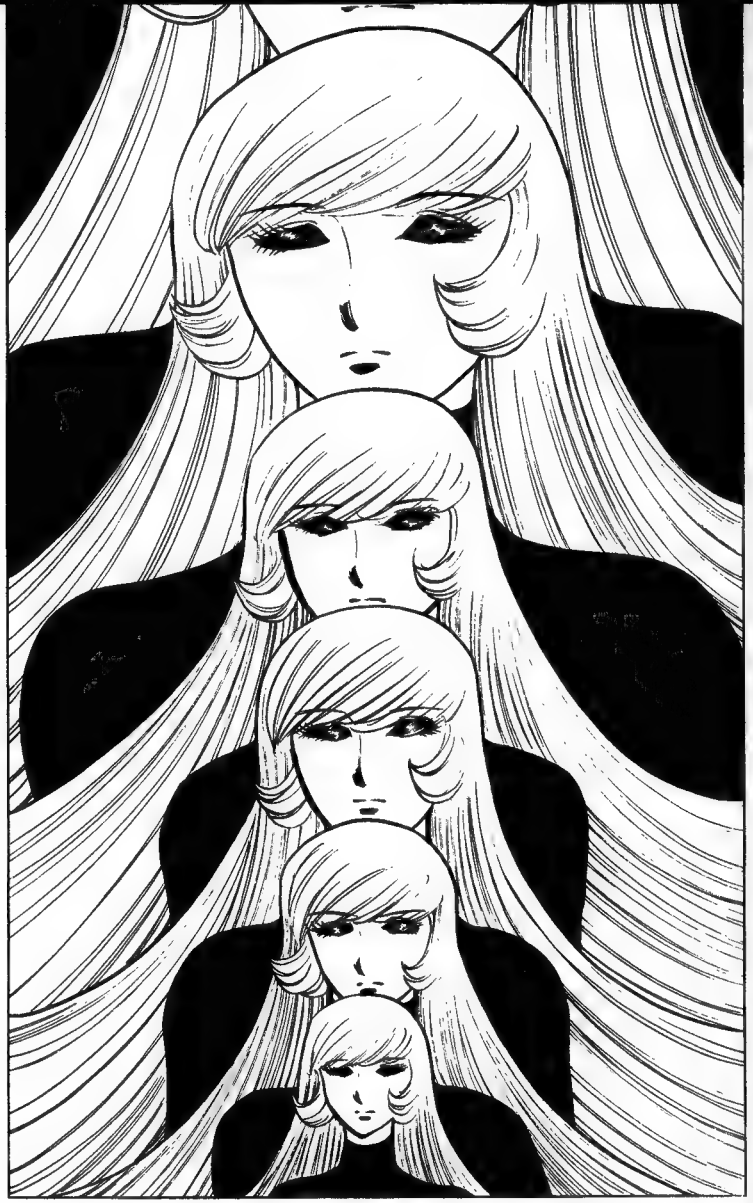

GARO ...
GARO ...
GARO ...
CH. 33
蜂女VSカメレオン男
THE QUEEN WASP VS THE CHAMELEON MAN
...THEN HE MUST BE IN THE MONITOR ROOM.
IF HE'S NOT HERE TRAINING...
HE'S NOT HERE.


GARO!!

WHA...

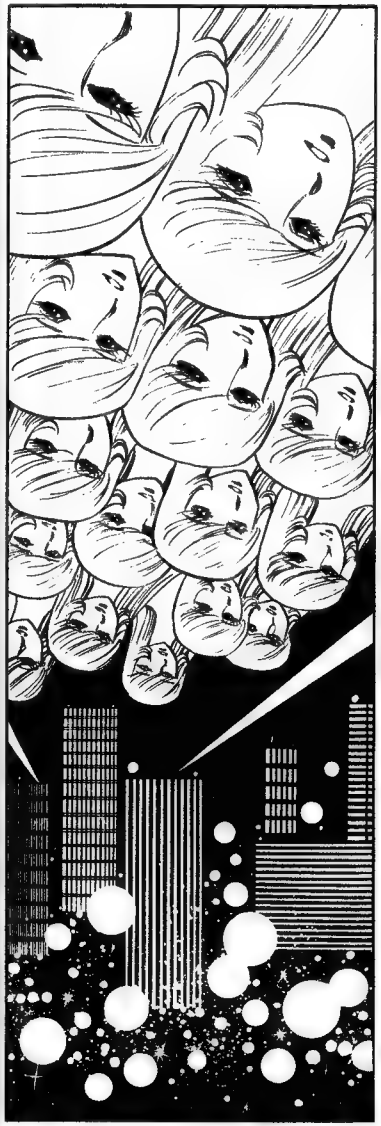
R-RYUSEI, DEAR BROTHER?!
OH!!
"RYUSEI..."
"IS IN DANGER!!"

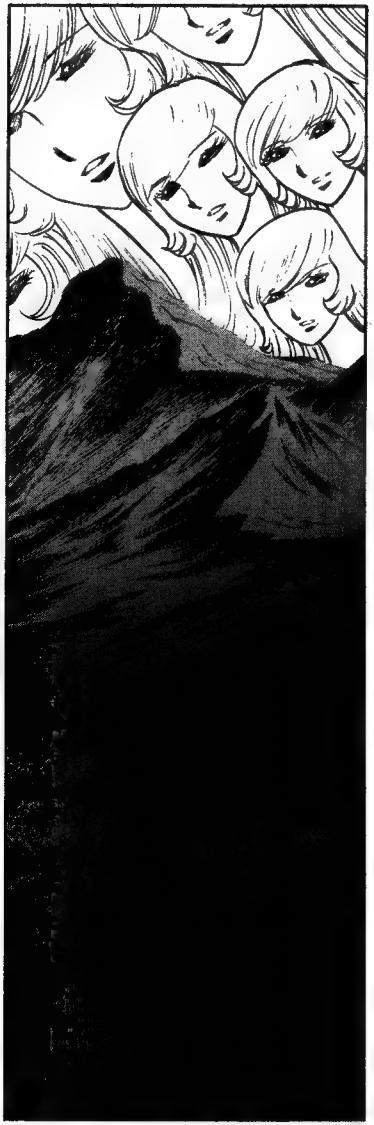
I...
...I HAVE TO GO ...
MA'AM!



STOP, GARO!
YOU CAN'T.
YOU'VE BARELY RECOVERED FROM YOUR INJURIES.
STOP IT!
YOU'RE IN NO SHAPE TO FIGHT!!
B...
BUT ...
I'LL CALL HIM WITH MY TELEPATHY.
HOW DO YOU EXPECT TO HELP HIM?
BUT WILL YOUR POWERS PENETRATE THE WALLS OF THEIR COMPOUND?
DON'T WORRY. RYUSEI'S MASK ALSO SERVES AS AN ANTENNA.
BESIDES, THIS VIDEO IS BEING BROADCAST FROM THERE, RIGHT?
....!!

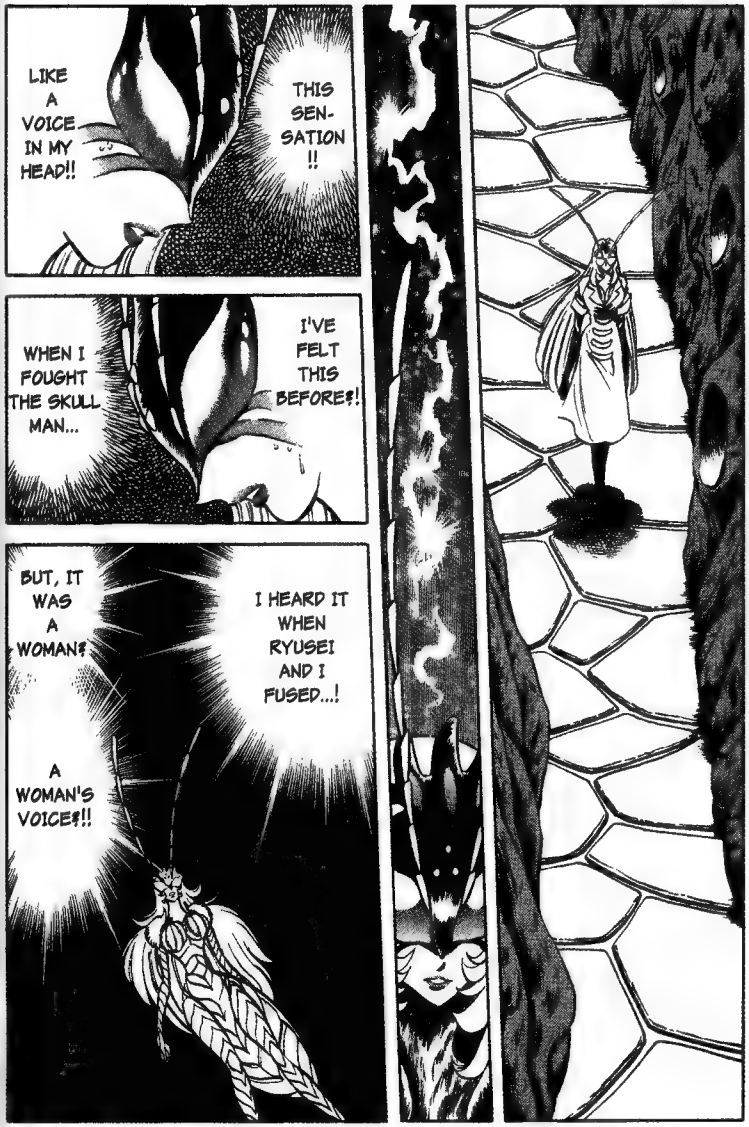
HOTEL HIVE





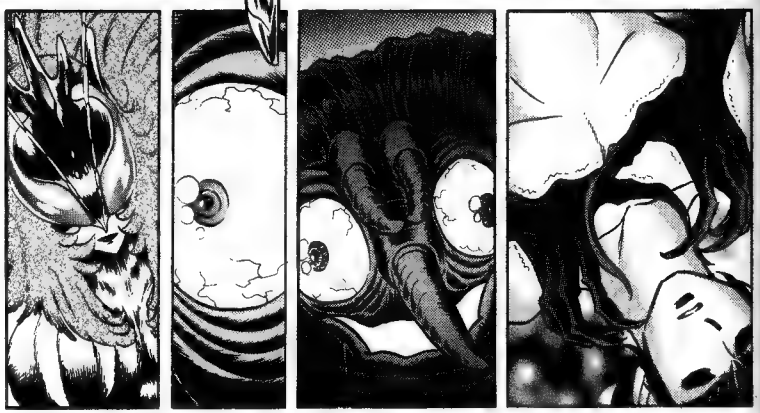
BRO-HUH
BRO-HUH
MA... MAYA?

THE CHAMEL-EON BOSS...
...IS TRYING TO...
...KILL...
RYUSEI?!
HOW DID HE...
...GET INTO THE LAB?!
NOOO!
DEAR BROTH-ER...!!


LIKE A VOICE IN MY HEAD!!
THIS SEN-SATION !!
WHEN I FOUGHT THE SKULL MAN...
I'VE FELT THIS BEFORE?!
BUT, IT WAS A WOMAN?
I HEARD IT WHEN RYUSEI AND I FUSED...!
A WOMAN'S VOICE?!!

NOT KILL... WHAT DO YOU MEAN?!
HE'S TRYING TO KILL ME! IT'S SELF-DEFENSE!
BUT YOU CAN'T.
IF YOU KILL HIM, YOU'LL ALSO KILL YOUR-SELF!
HUH?!
RYUSEI?

DON'T WORRY.
I'M ALL RIGHT, MAYA. I CAN HANDLE THIS.
THE LASHING THE COBRA MAN GAVE ME HASN'T WEAKENED ME SO MUCH THAT I CAN'T DEAL WITH A CLOWN LIKE THIS.
I THOUGHT SO...
...BUT WHAT I'M WORRIED ABOUT...
...IS YOU NOT BEING ABLE TO CONTROL YOUR POWERS AND KILLING HIM.
BROTHER, YOU DARE NOT KILL HIM!

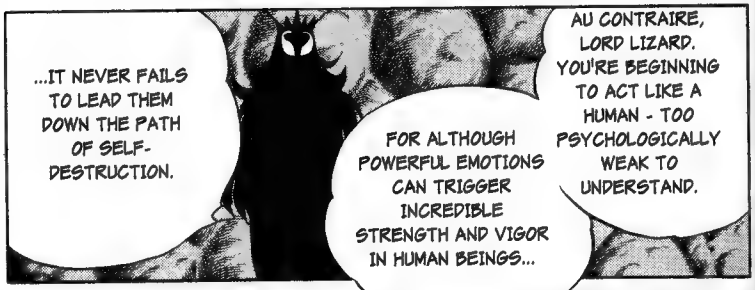


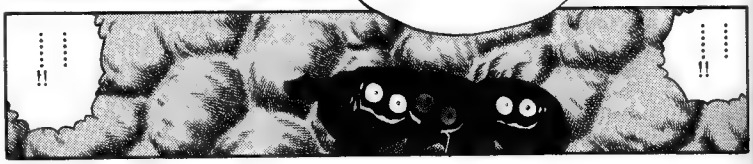
THE QUEEN WASP AND I CAN NEVER FALL IN LOVE WHILE YOU'RE ALIVE!
THAT'S WHY YOU NEED TO DIE!!
OKAY?!
URGG?!

WH... WHY?!
DON'T YOU KNOW THAT I LOVE YOU!
WHY?!
... CHAMELEON BOSSMAN.
TORU GOSHIKI !!
SHUT UP AND DIE...

YOU POISONED ME!!
POISON!!
AGH. Y...YO U...
OWW ...
POI...
... POI-SONED ME?!
POI...
UHHH ...
AH...
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, FALL IN LOVE!

THAT'S RIGHT, BOSS! YOU TELL HER!!
THERE'S NO WAY YOU CAN CONTROL LOVE...
WHA...WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT?

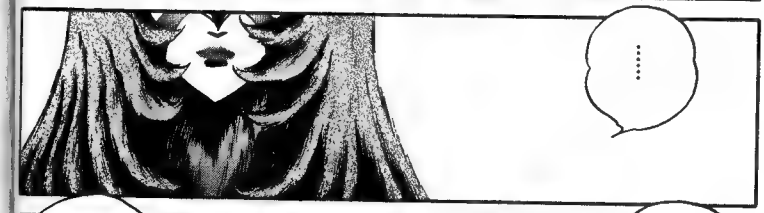

...IT NEVER FAILS TO LEAD THEM DOWN THE PATH OF SELF-DESTRUCTION.
FOR ALTHOUGH POWERFUL EMOTIONS CAN TRIGGER INCREDIBLE STRENGTH AND VIGOR IN HUMAN BEINGS...
AU CONTRAIRE, LORD LIZARD. YOU'RE BEGINNING TO ACT LIKE A HUMAN - TOO PSYCHOLOGICALLY WEAK TO UNDERSTAND.


.....!!
.....!!

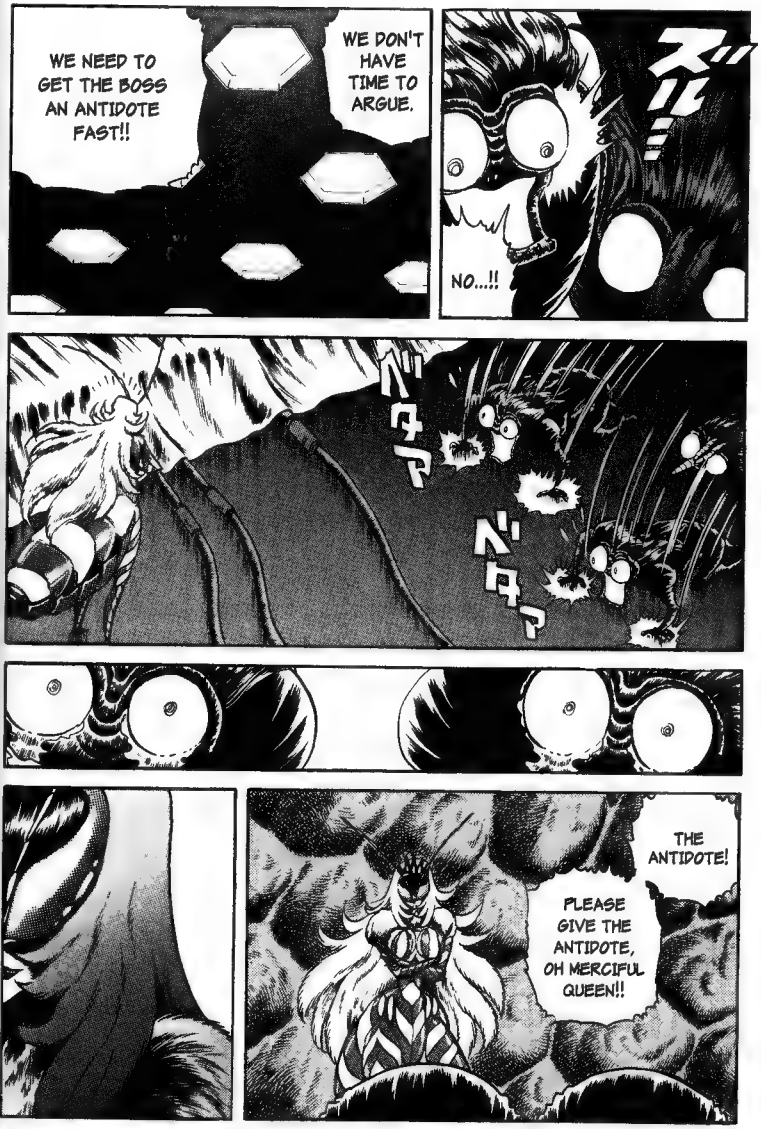
NOW WHAT DO YOU THINK WOULD HAPPEN IF SUPERHUMANS SUCH AS OURSELVES BECAME UNABLE TO CONTROL OUR EMOTIONS?!
THE DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR WROUGHT BY NORMAL HUMANS IS OFTEN IMPRESSIVE.

.....!!
.....!!

YOU BETTER HAVE A GOOD ANSWER, QUEEN!!
HANG ON, MR. GOSHIKI ...
YEAH, WHY?!


.....

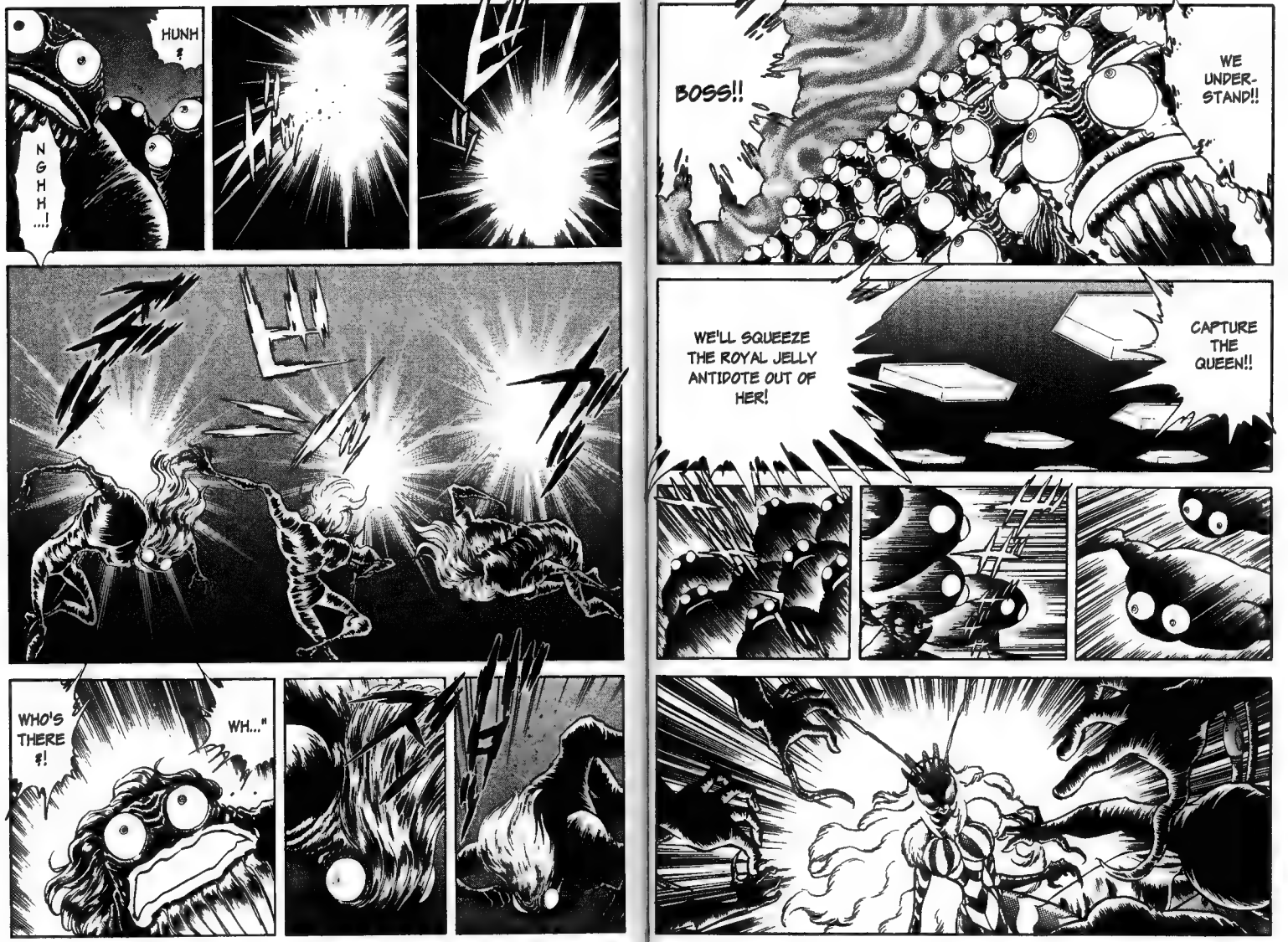
IN OTHER WORDS, WE MUST NEVER SUCCUMB TO EMOTIONS SUCH AS LOVE AND INFATUATION.
FOOLS! LISTEN CAREFULLY!
SUPERHUMANS SUCH AS US MUST NEVER BECOME SLAVES TO OUR EMOTIONS!


WE NEED TO GET THE BOSS AN ANTIDOTE FAST!!
WE DON'T HAVE TIME TO ARGUE.
NO...!!
THE ANTIDOTE!
PLEASE GIVE THE ANTIDOTE, OH MERCIFUL QUEEN!!

YOU USE YOUR POWERS ONLY TO SATISFY YOUR OWN DESIRES AND LUSTS. YOU ARE, THEREFORE, NOT WORTHY TO SURVIVE IN OUR NEW WORLD ORDER.
I HAVE DIFFICULTY UNDERSTANDING HOW A MAN LIKE YOU ROSE TO A POSITION OF LEADERSHIP AMONG YOUR FELLOW CREATURES.
YOUR DEATH WILL BE LOOKED UPON AS A SACRIFICE FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORGANIZATION.
DO YOU UNDERSTAND, 'MY LOVE', MR. CHAMELEON?
...FOR MY OWN SATISFACTION!
AND ONLY COINCIDENTALLY ...
...DAMN WOMAN!!
GGG--

I UNDER-STAND, BOSS!!
BOSS!
HOW DID YOU GET SO MANY OF YOUR SOLDIERS IN HERE?!
TEARS ...
CHAME-LEONS?!

!!
WHAT ...?!
WATER TRICKLING DOWN THE WALLS, EVERY-WHERE!


BOSS!!
WE UNDER-STAND!!
WE'LL SQUEEZE THE ROYAL JELLY ANTIDOTE OUT OF HER!
CAPTURE THE QUEEN!!

HUNH ?
NGHH ...!
WHO'S THERE ?!
WH..."

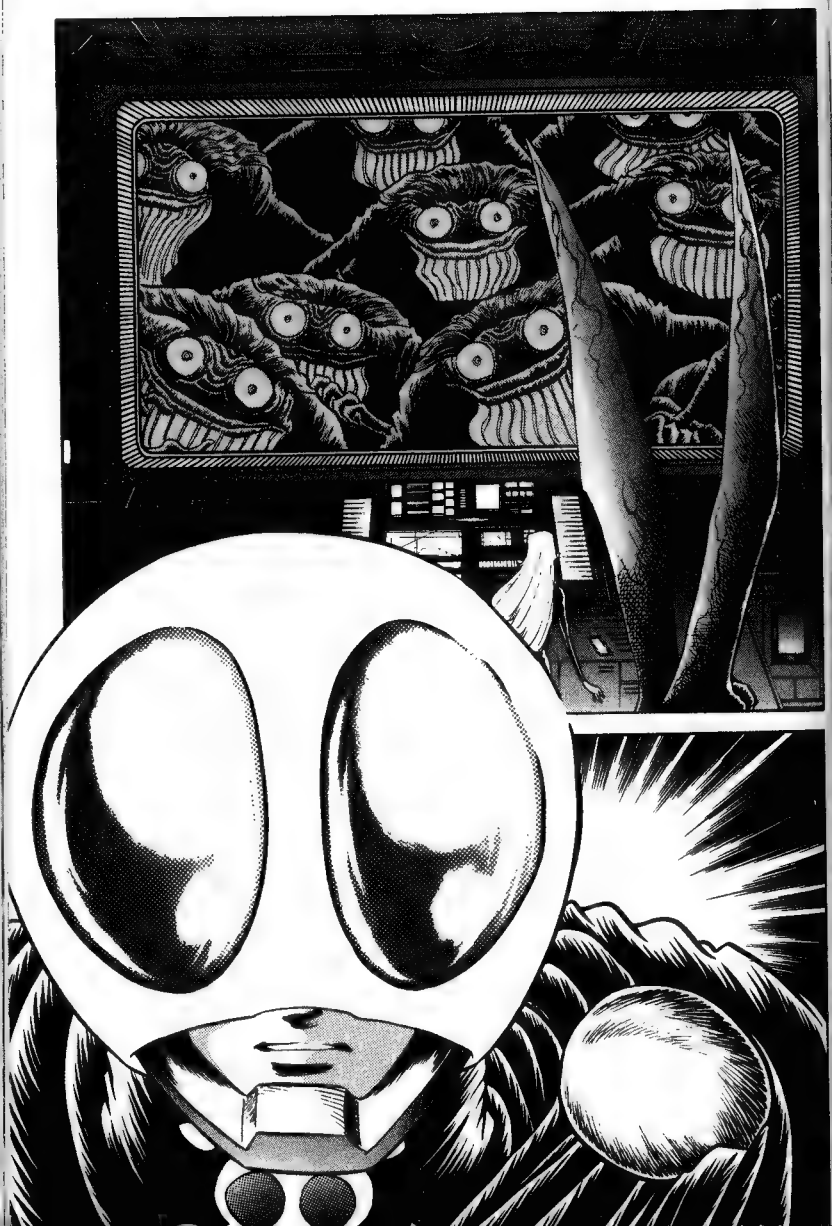
STEP ASIDE, RYUSEI.
YOU'RE IN NO SHAPE TO FIGHT YET!

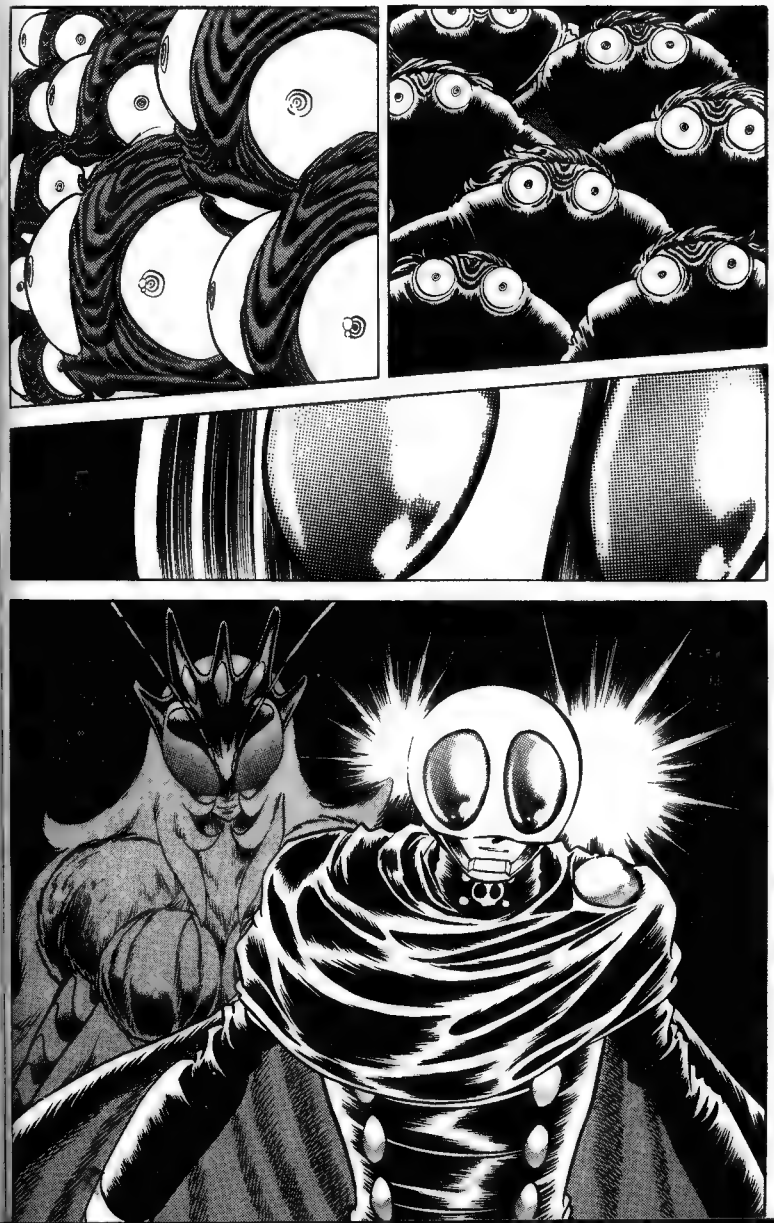
I'M GOING TO REPAY MY DEBT TO YOU.
RIGHT HERE! RIGHT NOW!

HA HA...
DON'T LET YOUR EMOTIONS GET THE BETTER OF YOU...
QUEENIE ?

A DEBT... NO, DON'T THINK OF IT AS A DEBT.
RYUSEI, I'M ONLY HELPING YOU BECAUSE ...

RYUSE!!
RYUSEI CHISATO!
OUT OF OUR WAY!
WE DON'T HAVE TIME TO WASTE WITH YOU!!
HAND OVER THE QUEEN!!



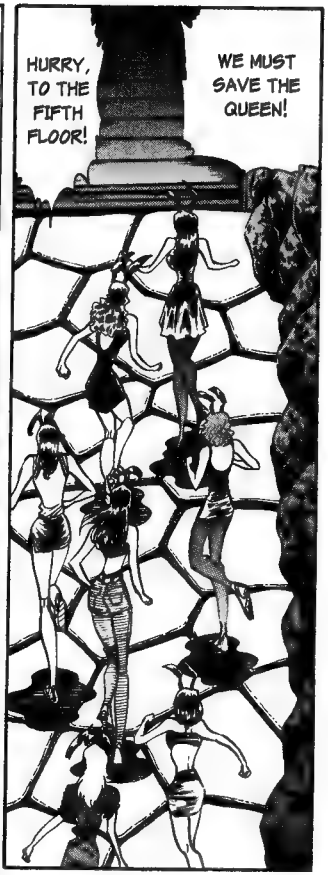


UHH...
UH!
LOOKS LIKE IT...
IT SEEMS WE'RE GOING INTO BATTLE.
.....

WHAT DO WE DO, HIOKA?!
SOMETHING'S HAPPENING INSIDE!
DO YOU WANNA GO IN?
.....
HMM?!
WAIT... NORMAL HUMANS LIKE US...
...ARE HELPLESS AGAINST THEM...
IF ONLY ONE OF US HAD THE STRENGTH TO FIGHT AGAINST THEM!!
WE NEED MORE STRENGTH!

AIGAIMU

NO! DON'T LET THEM TAKE THE QUEEN!!
THE WORKER WASPS ARE COMING!


HURRY, TO THE FIFTH FLOOR!
WE MUST SAVE THE QUEEN!

ドクン…
ドクン…
ドクン…
ドクン…

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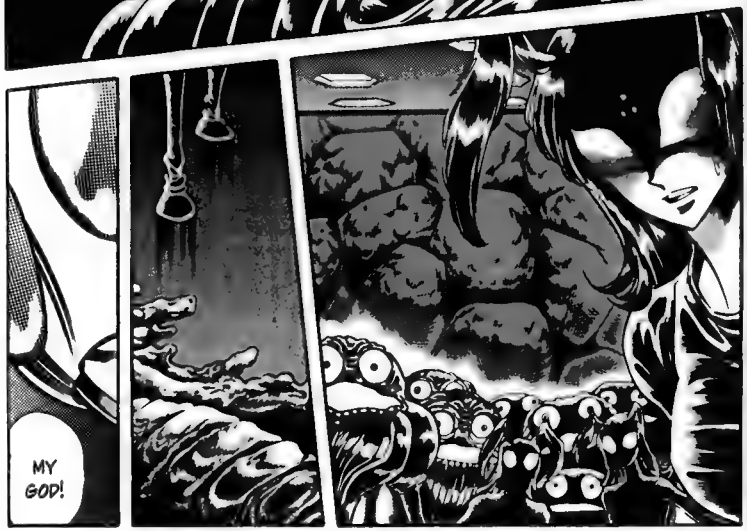
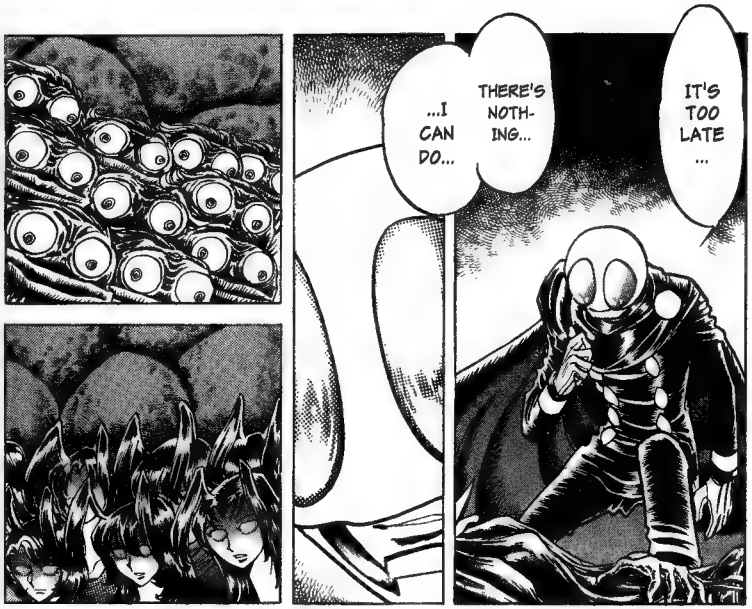
スカルマンVS蠍男

THE SKULL MAN VS THE SCORPION MAN

MY QUEEN!!
BO... BOSS!!

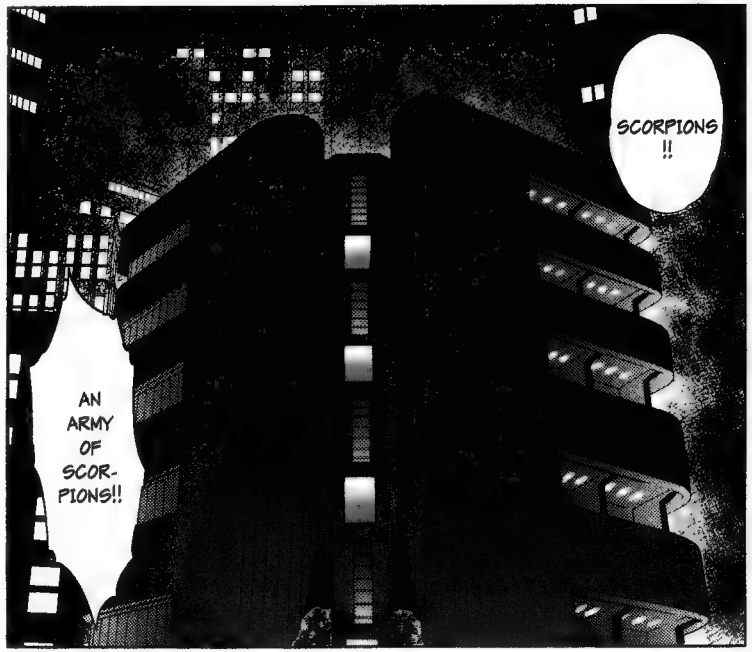
HOW...
HOW COULD THIS...
MY QUEEN ...!!

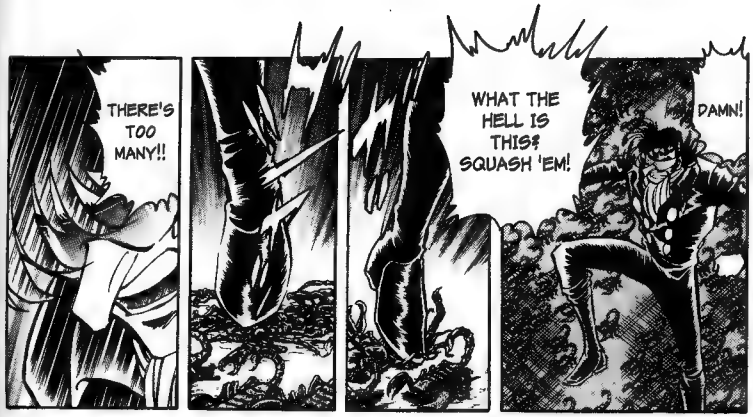

MY GOD!

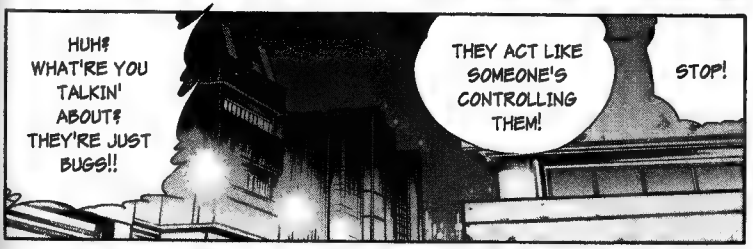

IT'S TOO LATE ...
THERE'S NOTH-ING...
...I CAN DO...

SOME THING'S CRAWLING PAST US!!
WATCH OUT!!
WHOA !!
WHAT !!
EEEE!

IT'S...


SCORPIONS !!
AN ARMY OF SCOR-PIONS!!


THERE'S TOO MANY!!
WHAT THE HELL IS THIS? SQUASH 'EM!
DAMN!


HUH? WHAT'RE YOU TALKIN' ABOUT? THEY'RE JUST BUGS!!
THEY ACT LIKE SOMEONE'S CONTROLLING THEM!
STOP!

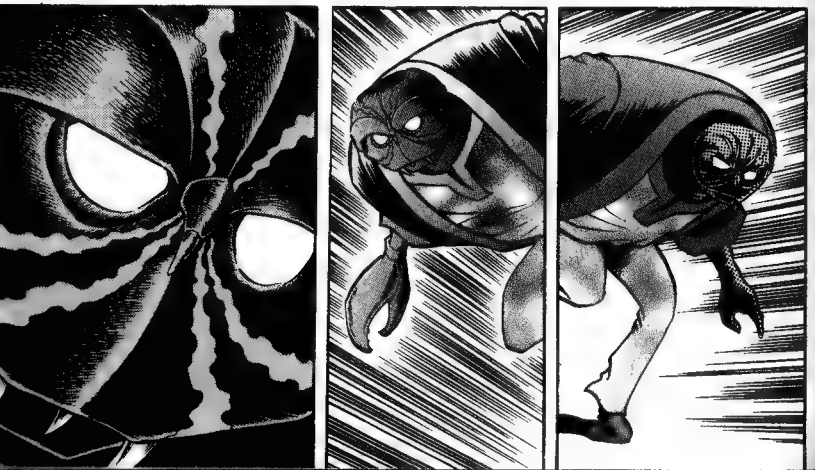
LOOK!!

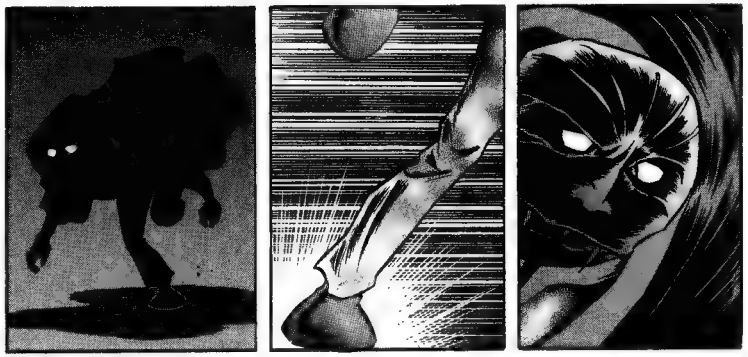
IT'S AS IF THEY ARE BEING ORDERED BY SOME-ONE TO GO AFTER A COMMON TARGET.
YOU'RE RIGHT. THEY'RE IGNORING US...

AH! THE JOURNALIST, MISS KATSURAGAWA, I BELIEVE?

HMM...
WHA-
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
HOW UNEXPECTED TO MEET YOU HERE... I SUPPOSE IT'S YOUR REPORTER'S NOSE FOR TROUBLE?
WHAT ABOUT YOU? WHAT BRINGS YOU AND YOUR, ER, MALE FRIENDS TO THIS HOTEL DIS-TRICT?

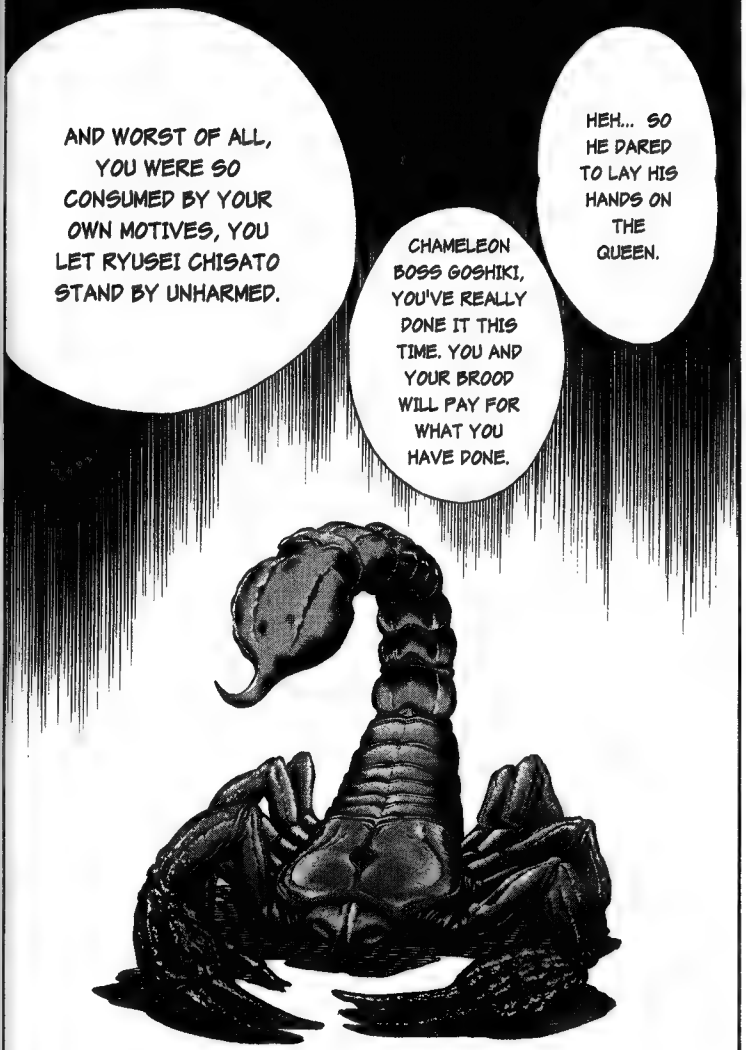
GORO AYASE, OF THE KAGURA FAMILY!



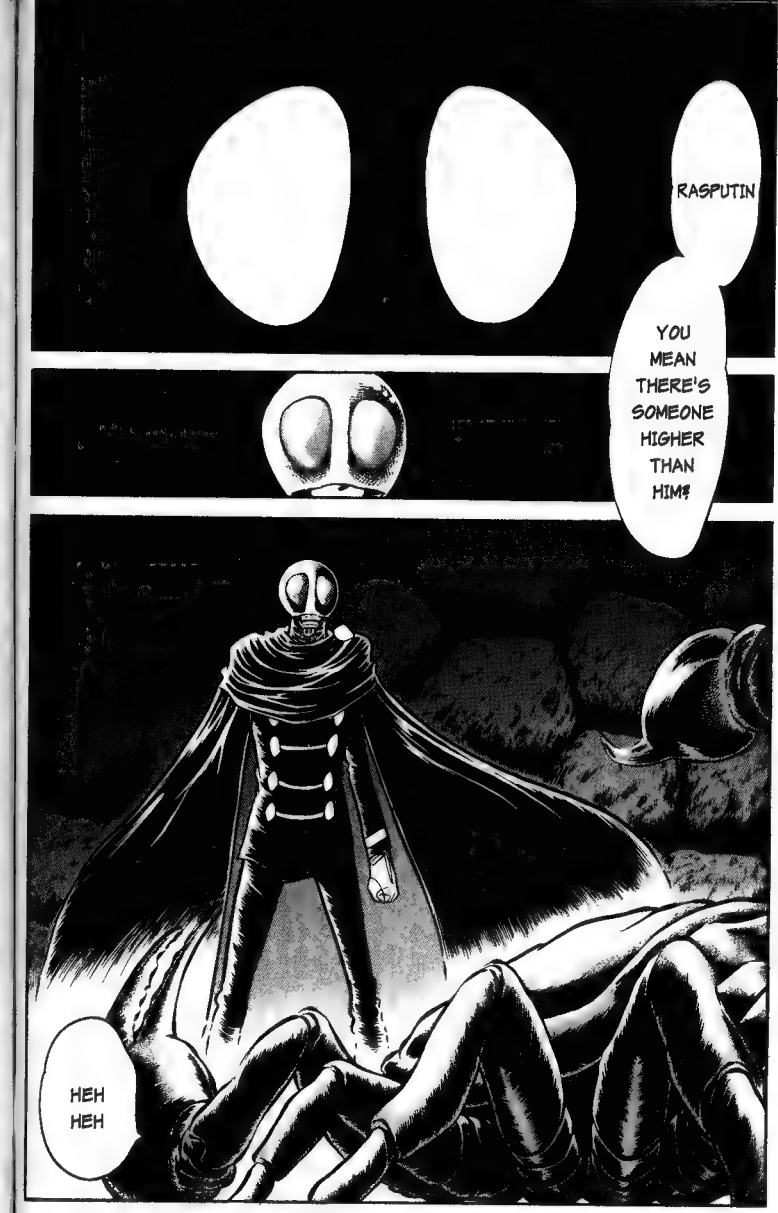


WHA-
!!

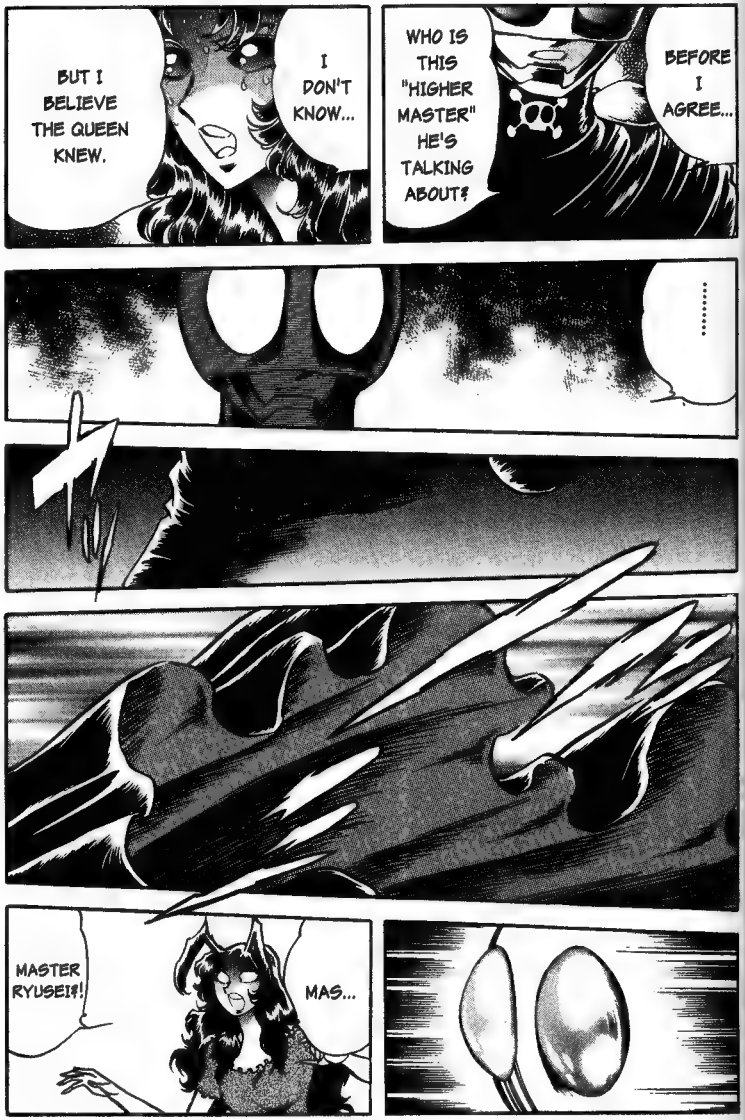
HEH
HEH
HEH...


HEH... SO HE DARED TO LAY HIS HANDS ON THE QUEEN.
CHAMELEON BOSS GOSHIKI, YOU'VE REALLY DONE IT THIS TIME. YOU AND YOUR BROOD WILL PAY FOR WHAT YOU HAVE DONE.
AND WORST OF ALL, YOU WERE SO CONSUMED BY YOUR OWN MOTIVES, YOU LET RYUSEI CHISATO STAND BY UNHARMED.

AND YOU, WORKER WASPS. YOU'LL PAY FOR FAILING TO PROTECT YOUR QUEEN.
MASTER RASPUTIN-
NO-
THE HIGHER MASTER-
HE WILL NOT FORGIVE YOUR INCOMPETENCE!
SC... SCORPION MAN?!
UHHH...


RASPUTIN
YOU MEAN THERE'S SOMEONE HIGHER THAN HIM?
HEH HEH

COME OUT, RYUSEI.
NO!
EEK
I'M NOT LETTING YOU GET AWAY THIS TIME...
ONLY ONE OF US WILL LEAVE HERE!
SO...
DON'T BOTHER TRYING TO ESCAPE ...
.....
MASTER RYUSEI!


BUT I BELIEVE THE QUEEN KNEW.
I DON'T KNOW...
WHO IS THIS "HIGHER MASTER" HE'S TALKING ABOUT?
BEFORE I AGREE...
.....
MASTER RYUSEI!!
MAS...

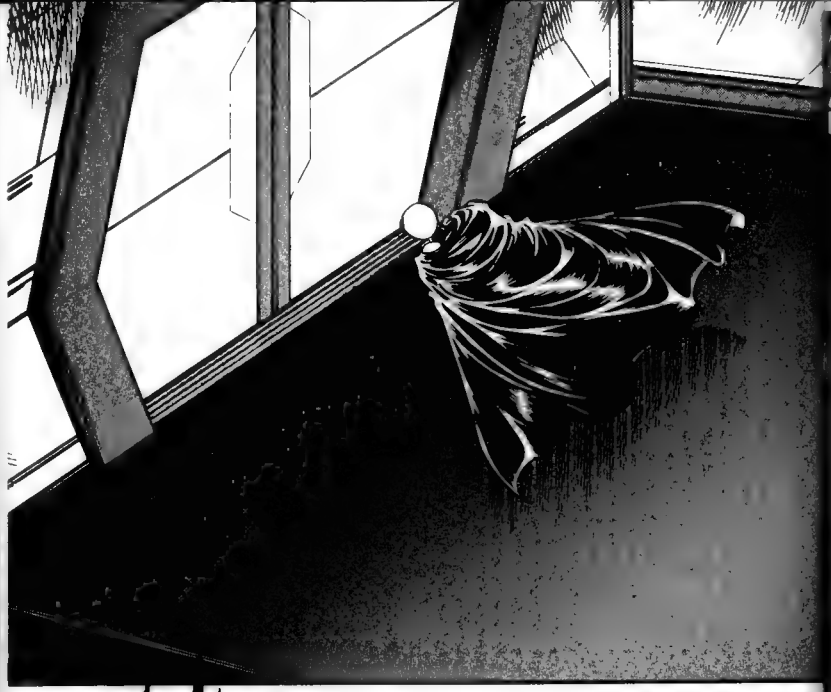
WE WASPS WILL ASSIST YOU!
I'M THE CHIEF WORKER WASP, SAYAKA KIJIMA.
YOU DON'T NEED TO STEP INTO THE SCORPION MAN'S TRAP!
THERE'S ANOTHER WAY OUT OF THIS HOTEL.
OUR QUEEN IS GONE, BUT WE STILL CARRY OUT HER ORDERS.
IT'S TOO RECKLESS FOR YOU TO ACCEPT HIS CHALLENGE NOW!!
YOU ARE IN NO SHAPE TO FIGHT YET...

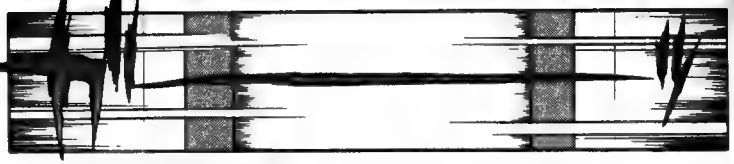
...AFTER I LEARN WHO HE IS!
I'LL ESCAPE...

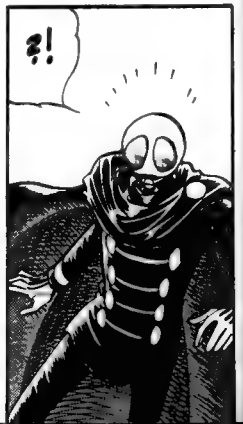
WAIT ...
PLEASE WAIT.
IF YOU FIGHT ...
...KEEP YOUR BATTLE HERE, WITHIN THE HOTEL HIVE!!

WHA-!!

UHHH ...
G...G GG...
BUT IF YOU WANT TO WALK AGAIN, YOU'LL HAVE TO SUFFER THROUGH WORSE PAIN THAN THIS.
DON'T WORRY. THAT WAS JUST A FRACTION OF MY POWER.
YOU WON'T DIE.



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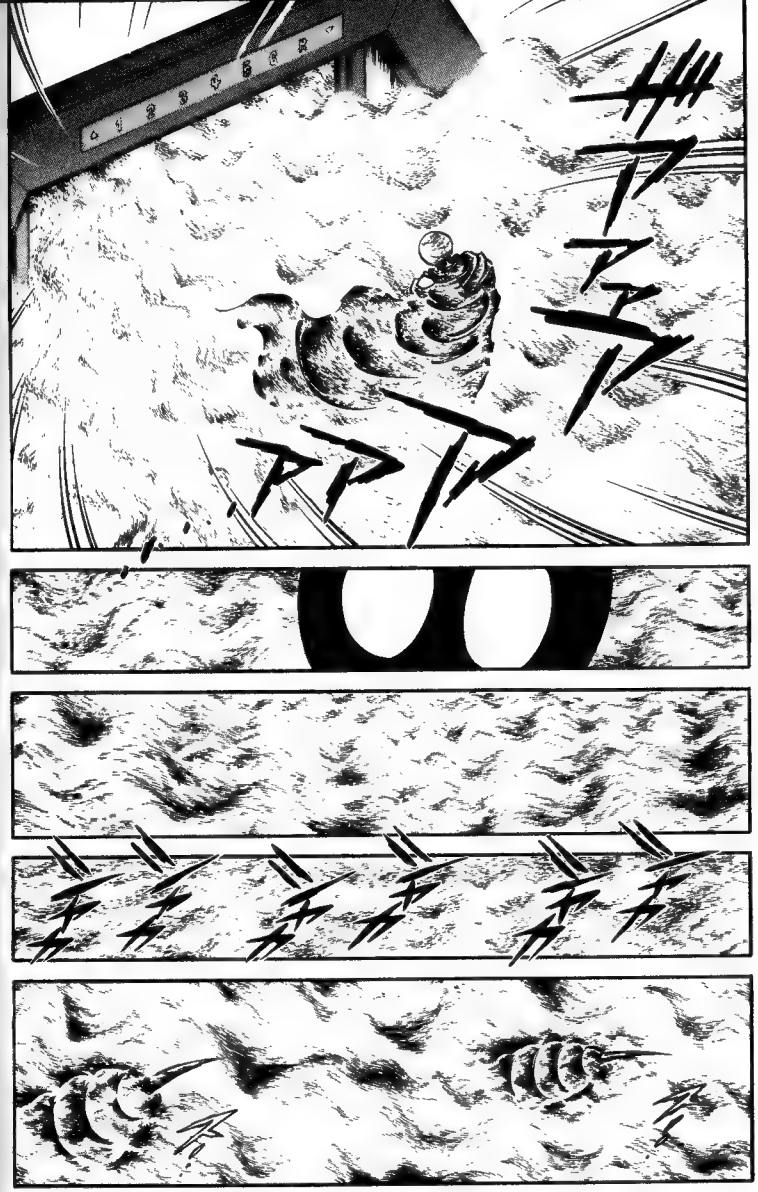
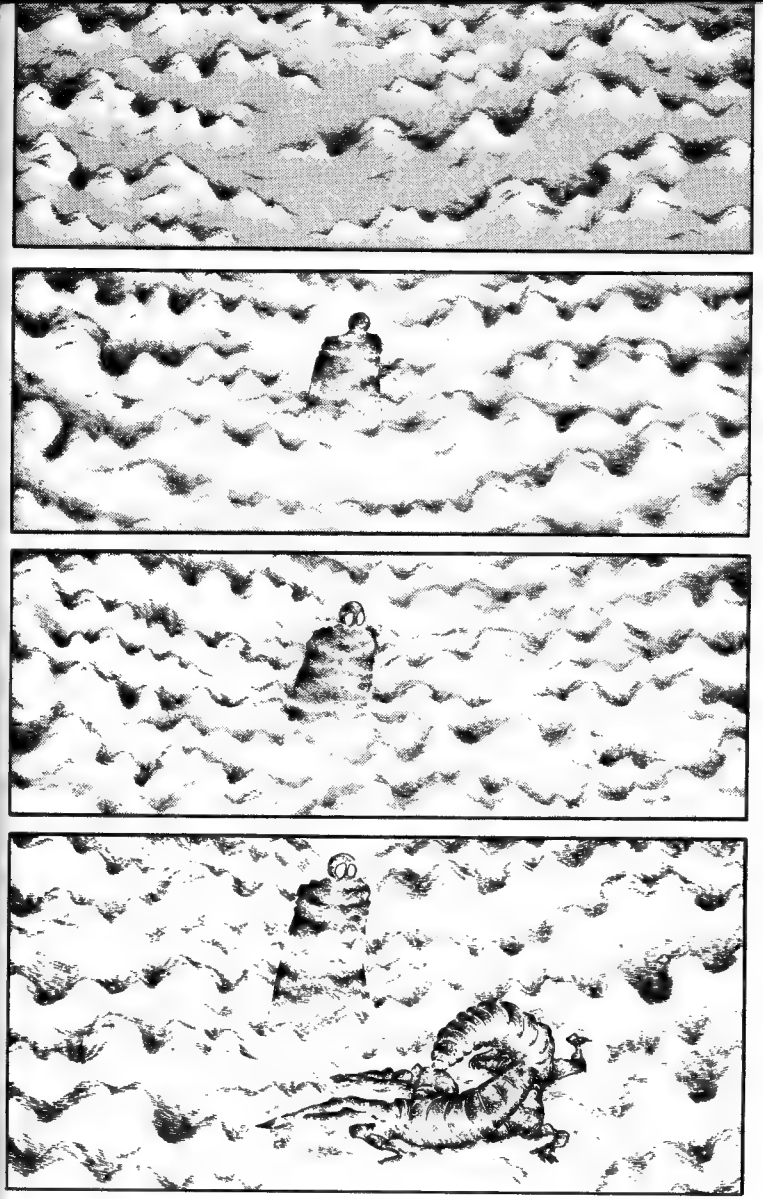




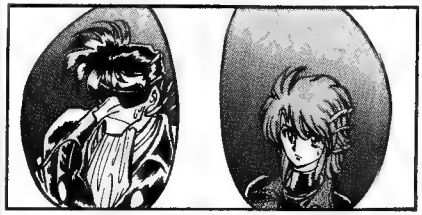
YOU NEVER FAIL TO SURPASS MY EXPECTATIONS.
NOT BAD.

KILLER SCORPI-ONS.
ANY FALSE MOVE, AND THEY'LL BE INJECTED WITH A POISON THAT WILL KILL THEM WITHIN SECONDS.
YOU DON'T WANT THESE TWO TO DIE, DO YOU?

I DON'T KNOW THESE GUYS. I'M INSULTED THAT YOU THINK I CAN BE BLACKMAILED THIS EASILY.
.....
OH, REALLY?

I GOT THE IMPRESSION THESE TWO ARE VERY SPECIAL TO YOU.
.....
THERE'S SOME-THING I WANT TO ASK YOU.

I FOUND THE PERFECT GIFT FOR YOU OUTSIDE.
SO I BROUGHT THEM IN.



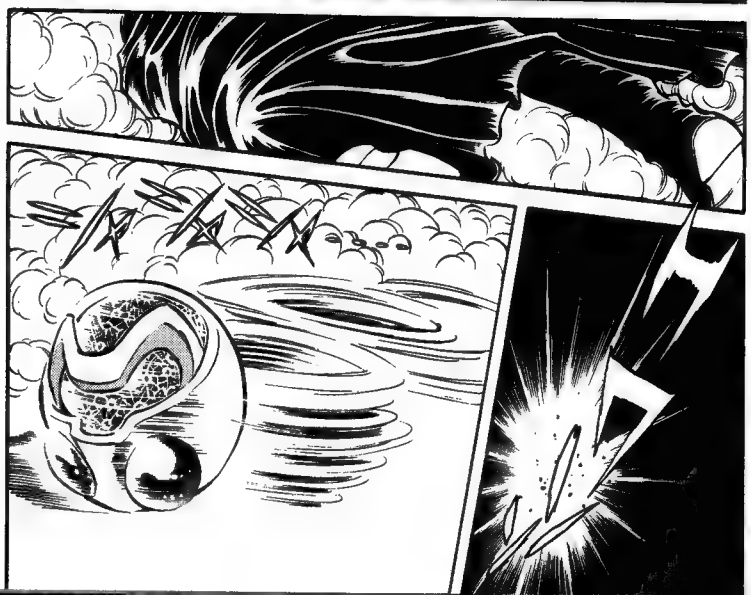
IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE OUT OF TRICKS.
AYASE, OLD PAL!!
OH, NO.

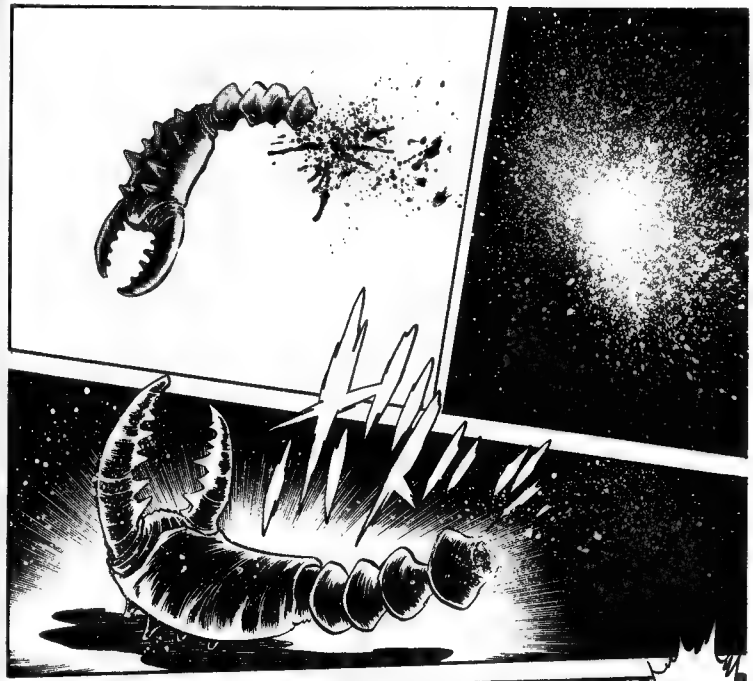
ALL RIGHT, WE'LL FIGHT FIRST. IF YOU WIN, I'LL TELL YOU.
YES, I KNOW.
WHA-?!
ERR...!
YES, I'LL TELL YOU ALL YOU WANT TO KNOW!
AH HHH!
YOU DO KNOW WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT, THEN.
I SEE...

I THINK YOU'VE ALREADY GUESSED.
SO DO YOU HOPE YOU'VE GUESSED RIGHT? OR WRONG?
WHICH, RYUSEI?
HAH HAH HAH
.....!!
SO YOU REALLY WANT TO KNOW? YOU'RE JUST DYING TO FIND OUT, EH?

35
失われた男
THE MISSING MAN

COULD THE MAN THAT RASPUTIN CALLS 'MASTER' BE...
...THE SAME MAN WHO CREATED YOU, RYUSEI!?
OKAY. LET'S BATTLE SO YOU CAN BLAB!



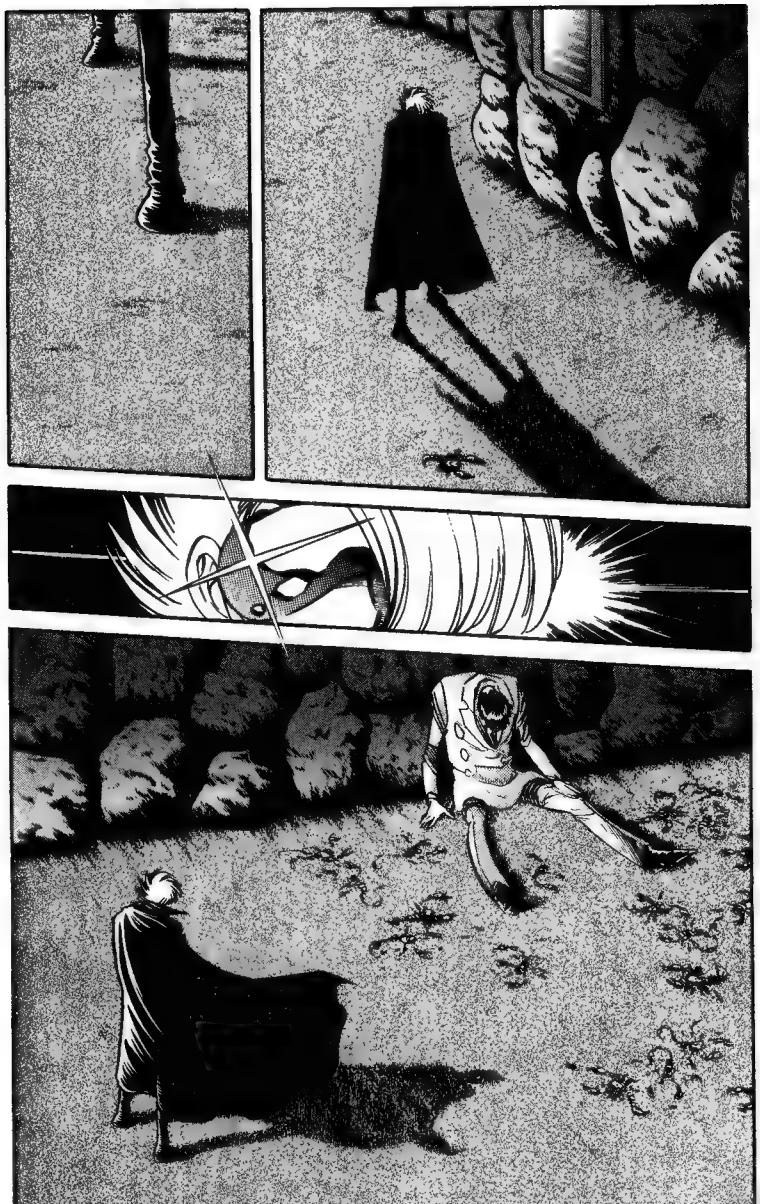


GGGG
...

UH!!
AHHH ...
HEH HEH
IS THAT MASK JUST DECORATION?
DOES IT GIVE YOU SPECIAL POWERS?
OR IS IT SOMETHING ELSE ENTIRELY?
LET'S FIND OUT!
OKAY...

ARE YOU A BIT SLOW TODAY?
OR ARE YOU JUST PLAYING WITH ME?
TAKE THIS, THEN!!
TOO SLOW!!

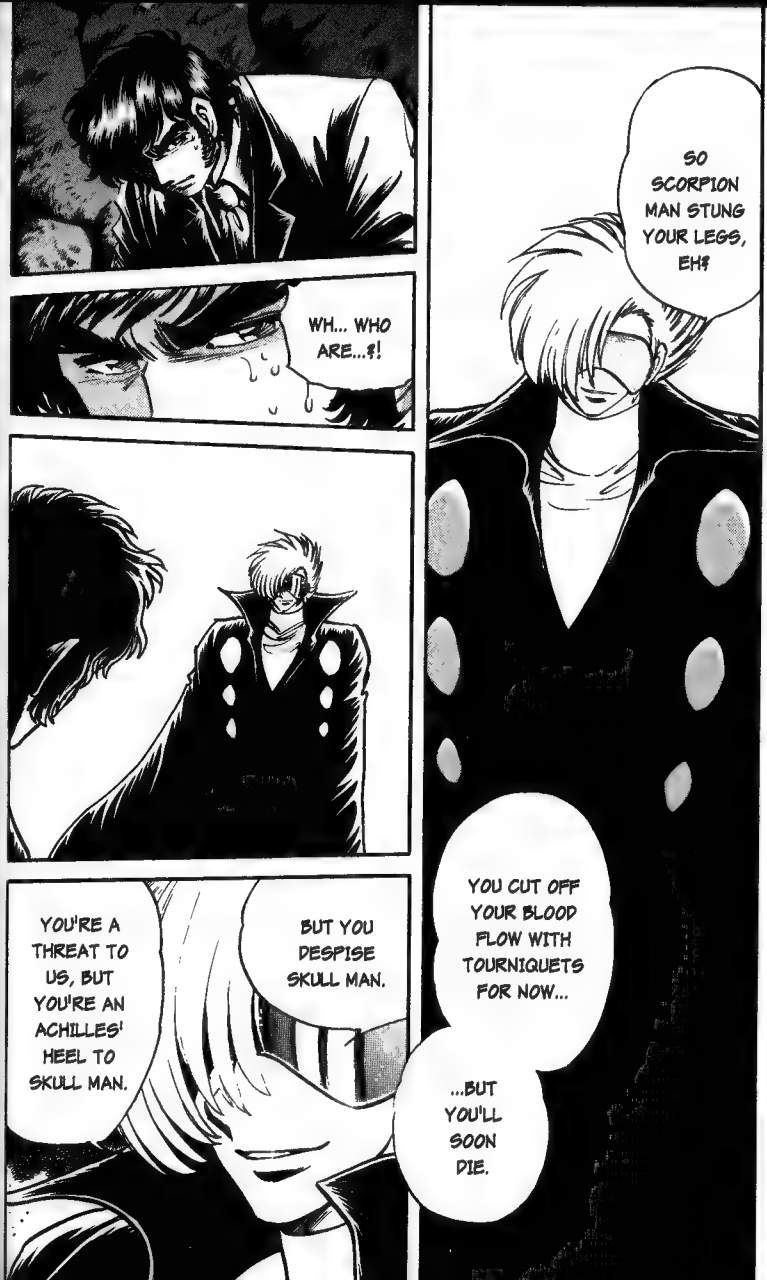
WHY DON'T YOU USE THAT TRICK YOU USED ON MY SOLDIERS, RYUSEI?
LET'S SEE IF IT WORKS ON MY BODY ARMOR!
OR DO YOU NEED YOUR MASK FOR THAT?
I'M SURE GETTIN' STRANGLED TODAY...
MY BAD LUCK TO NOT BE AT FULL STRENGTH.
BUT I WONDER, AYASE...
...WHY STRANGLE ME INSTEAD OF SHOOTING ME WITH YOUR POISON?
.....

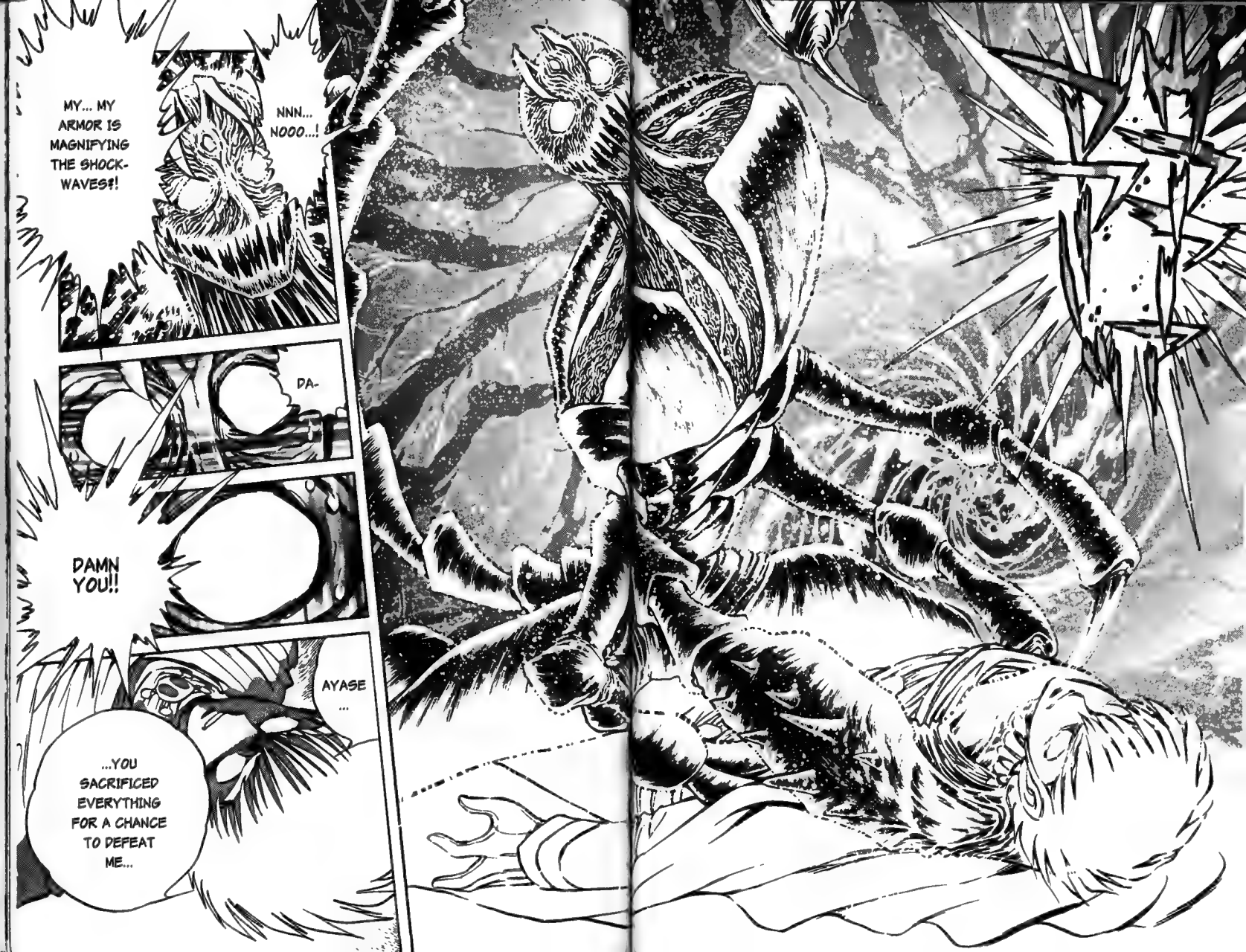


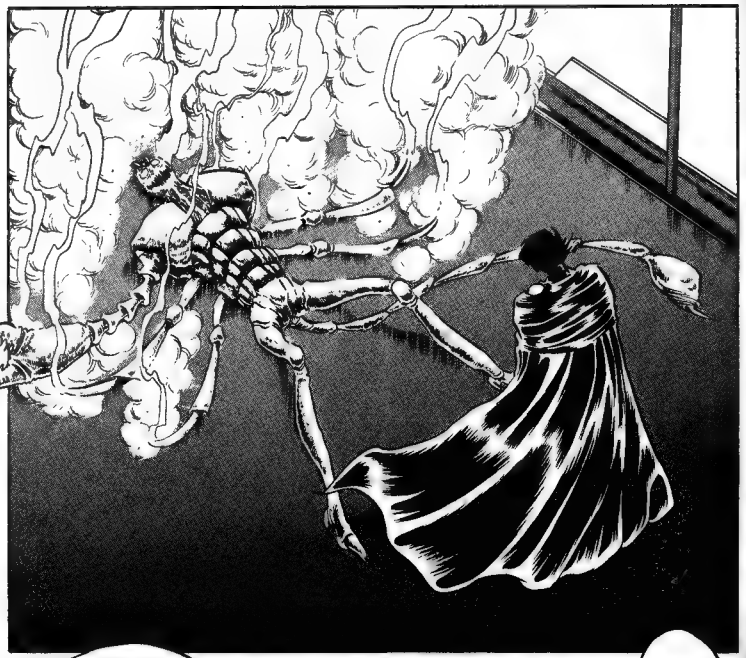
UHH...
UUHHHH
...

INTER-
ESTING!

.....
UNNH
...

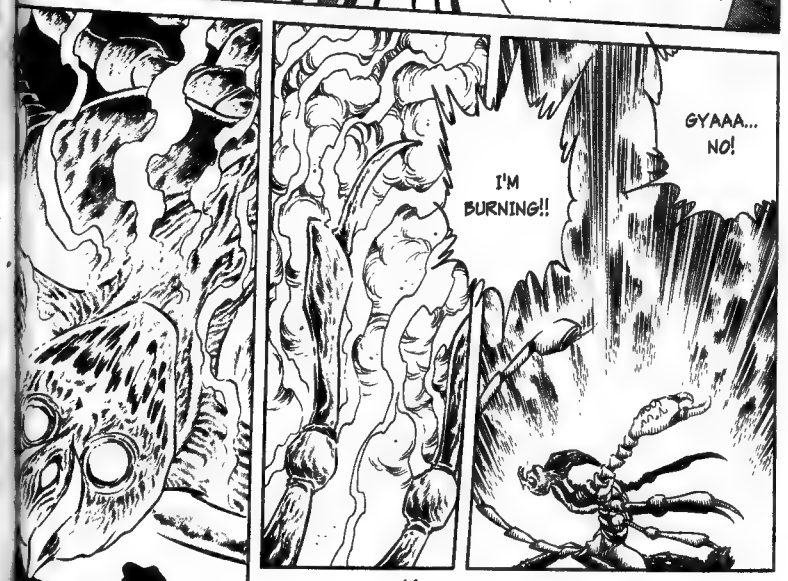

SO SCORPION MAN STUNG YOUR LEGS, EH?
WH... WHO ARE...?!
YOU CUT OFF YOUR BLOOD FLOW WITH TOURNIQUETS FOR NOW...
...BUT YOU'LL SOON DIE.
BUT YOU DESPISE SKULL MAN.
YOU'RE A THREAT TO US, BUT YOU'RE AN ACHILLES' HEEL TO SKULL MAN.

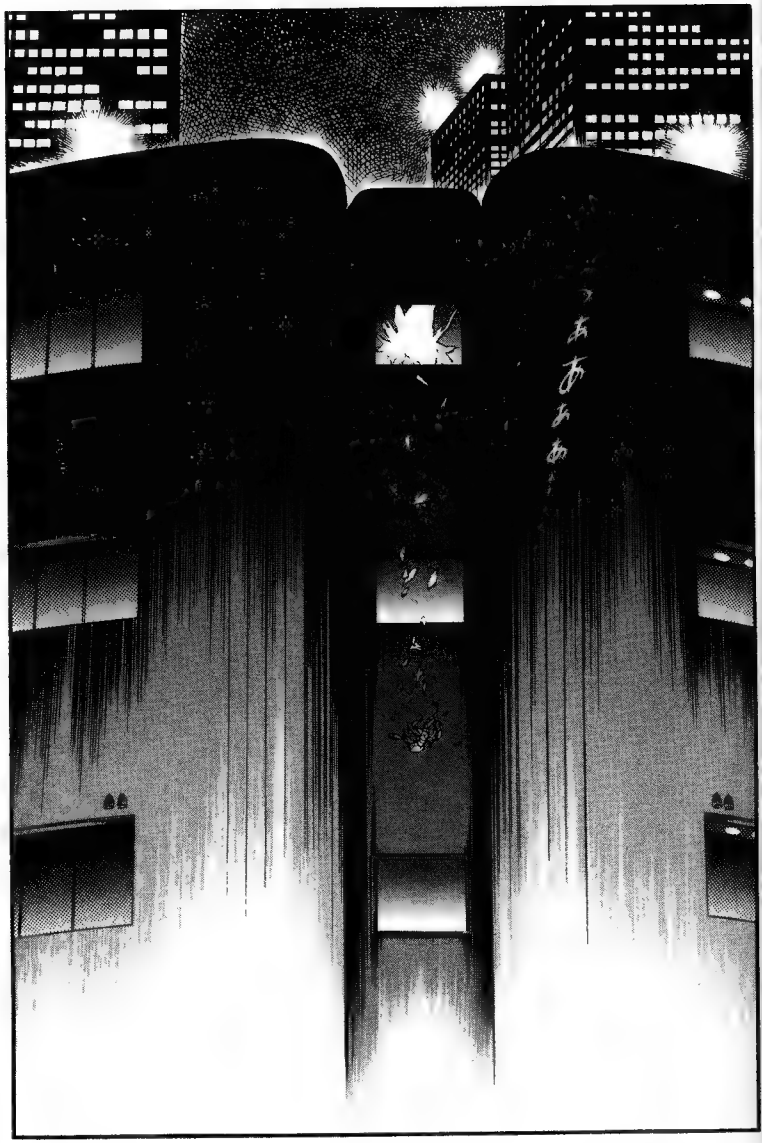

MY... MY ARMOR IS MAGNIFYING THE SHOCK-WAVES?!
NNN... NOOO...!
DA-
DAMN YOU!!
AYASE ...
...YOU SACRIFICED EVERYTHING FOR A CHANCE TO DEFEAT ME...



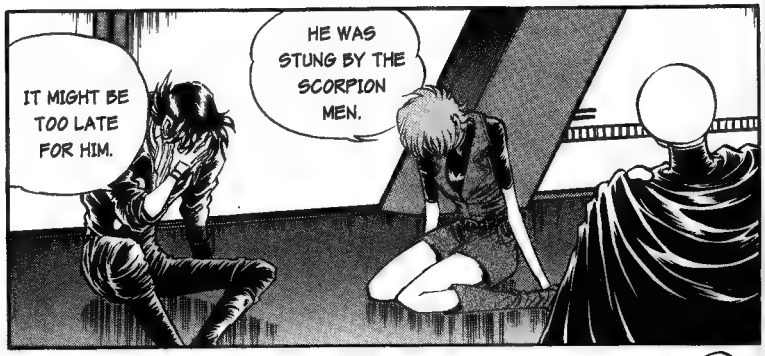
HOW'S IT FEEL...
...TO BURN FOR YOUR HUBRIS!
YOUR PRECIOUS SCORPION BODY ARMOR IS USELESS.
.....

NOTHING GOOD COMES OF WORTHLESS SACRI-FICES!!
BUT NOW YOU'LL SEE WHAT I LEARNED.
...JUST AS I DID TO AVENGE MY PARENTS.


GYAAA... NO!
I'M BURNING!!

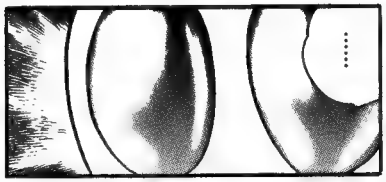

あああ

NEVER MIND.
I KNOW, AYASE!!
YOU WIN... RYUSEI.
I'LL TELL... RASPUTIN WAS...
...YOUR FATHER'S ASSISTANT...
...AND ...
HIS MASTER...
IS YOUR...


IT MIGHT BE TOO LATE FOR HIM.
HE WAS STUNG BY THE SCORPION MEN.

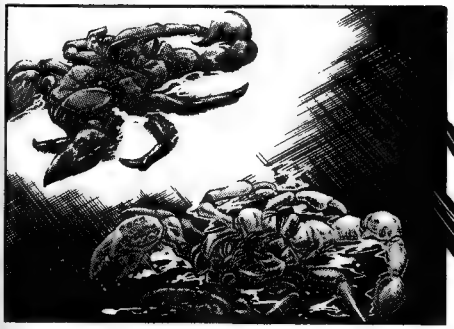
HE'S NOT ON THE STREET ANYMORE.

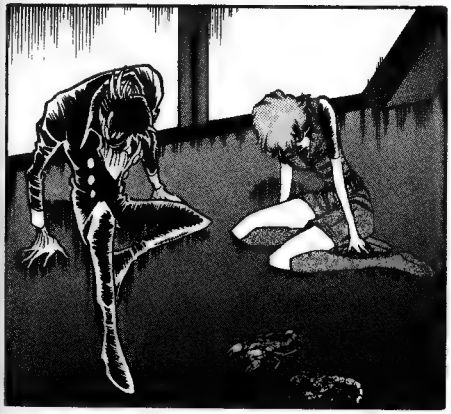
HUH?
MASTER RYUSE!
HE'S NOT THERE!

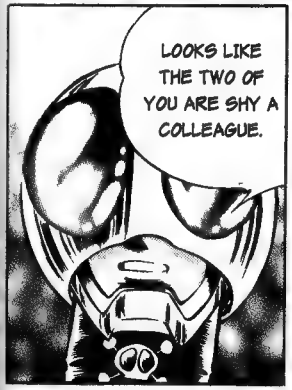

.....

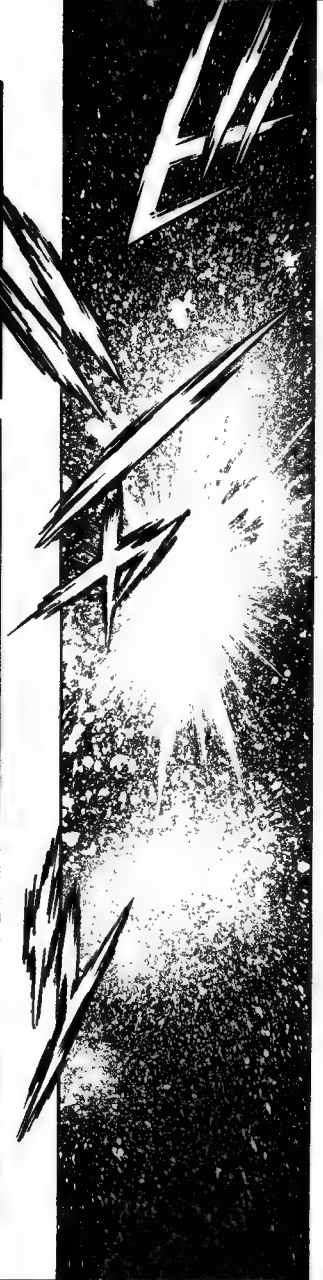
HE'S GOTTA BE!
BUT... HE...

MASTER RYUSE!
...WE HAVE TO DUMP THIS HIVE. IT'S NOT A SAFE HEAD-QUARTERS ANY MORE.
WE'LL FIND HIM. BUT FIRST...






LOOKS LIKE THE TWO OF YOU ARE SHY A COLLEAGUE.



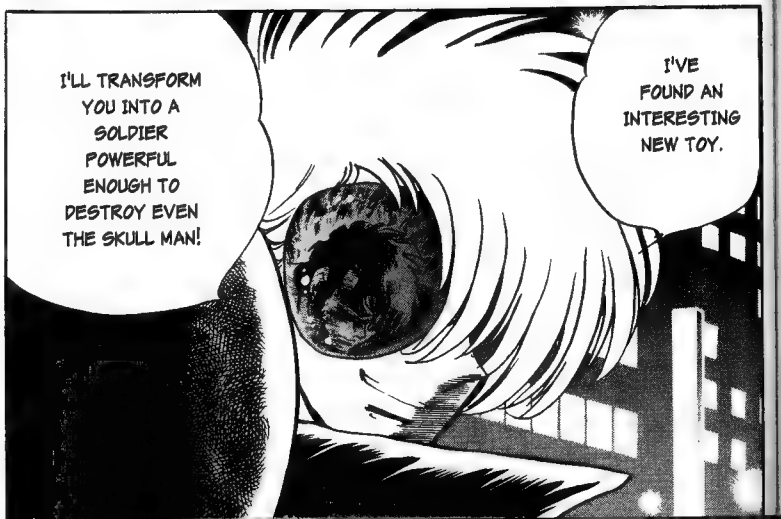
SIR?
YOUR NAME IS SAYAKA, RIGHT?
I UNDER-STAND.
I'LL DELIVER ALL ORDERS THROUGH YOU. ALL RIGHT?
THIS IS OUR TERRITORY. WE KNOW IT WELL.
DON'T WORRY, SIR.
BUT YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN.
FOR NOW, JUST GET OUT OF HERE SAFELY.
MAYBE WE SHOULD JOIN THE WASPS?
WHAT'LL WE DO?
WHA... WHAT ABOUT US?
.....

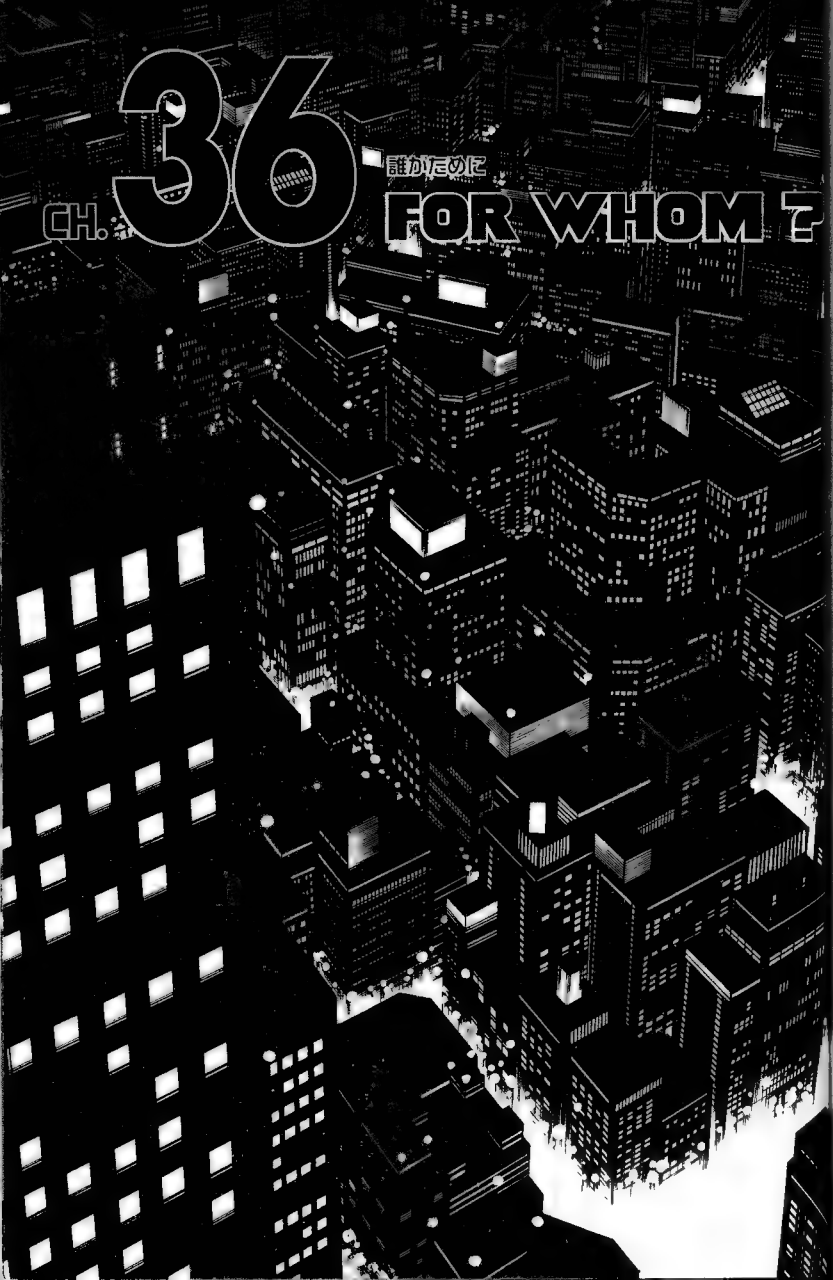
WHAT ARE YOUR ORDERS, SIR?
THEN DESTROY THIS HIVE. WAIT FOR ME TO CONTACT YOU.
GATHER ONLY WHAT'S IMPORTANT.

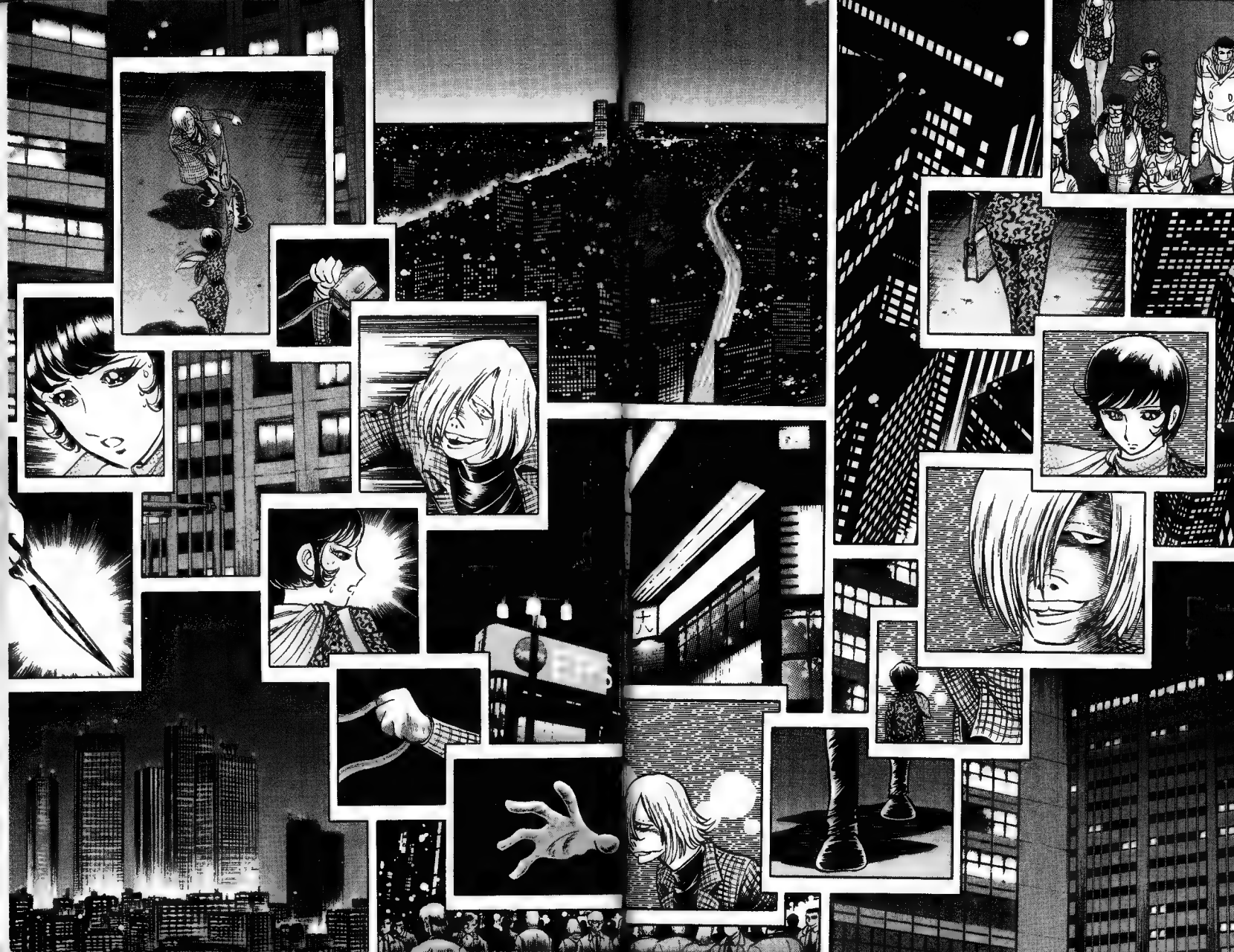
I'M SUPPOSED TO BELIEVE THEM?!
I GOTTA FIND HIOKA.
.....
WHA...?
I... CAN'T STAND UP!!
WHOA, US TOO?!
I DO FEEL WOOZY...
I, I THINK I'M GONNA BLACK OUT!
OF COURSE, WE'RE IMMUNIZED.
THIS HIVE IS PROTECTED FROM INTRUDERS BY A NERVE GAS. IT INHIBITS YOUR MOTOR SKILLS.
!?
I CAN'T... CAN'T WALK!!

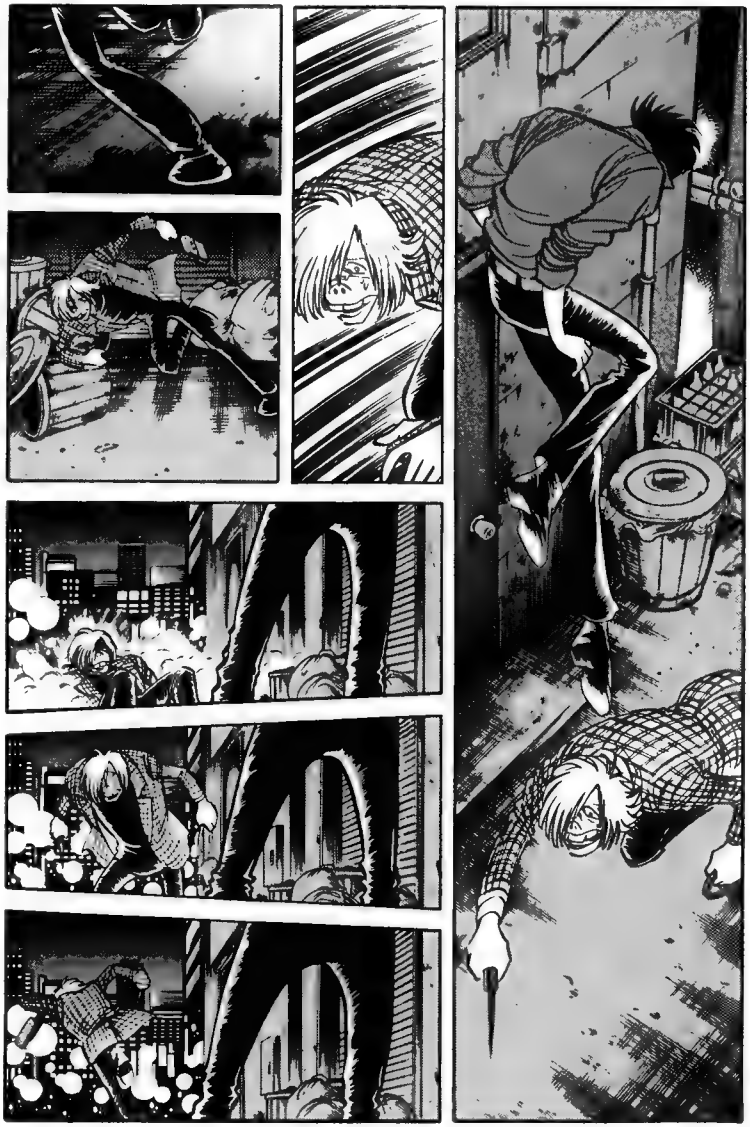
YES. THE SCORPION MEN ARE ALSO AFFECTED.
THEN... AYASE, TOO?
THE QUEEN HAD YOU IMMUNIZED EARLIER.
WHA...?!
UHH...

.....


I'LL TRANSFORM YOU INTO A SOLDIER POWERFUL ENOUGH TO DESTROY EVEN THE SKULL MAN!
I'VE FOUND AN INTERESTING NEW TOY.

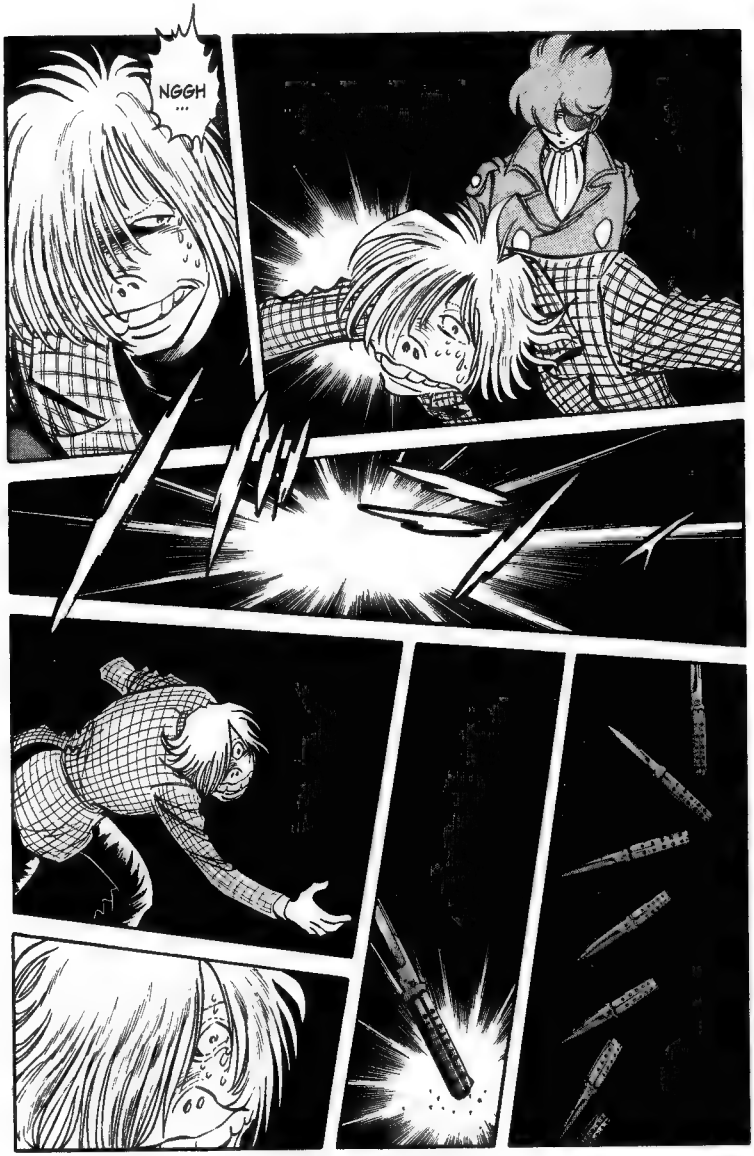

CH.36
誰がために
FOR WHOM ?



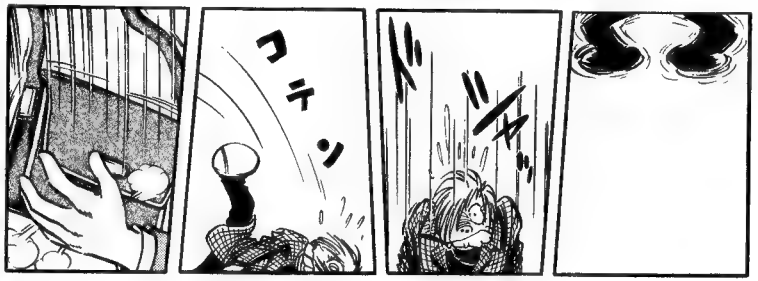


BETTER HELP THE GIRL.
.....

THIS PURSE ISN'T YOURS...
...IS IT?
!


NGGH...

グシャッ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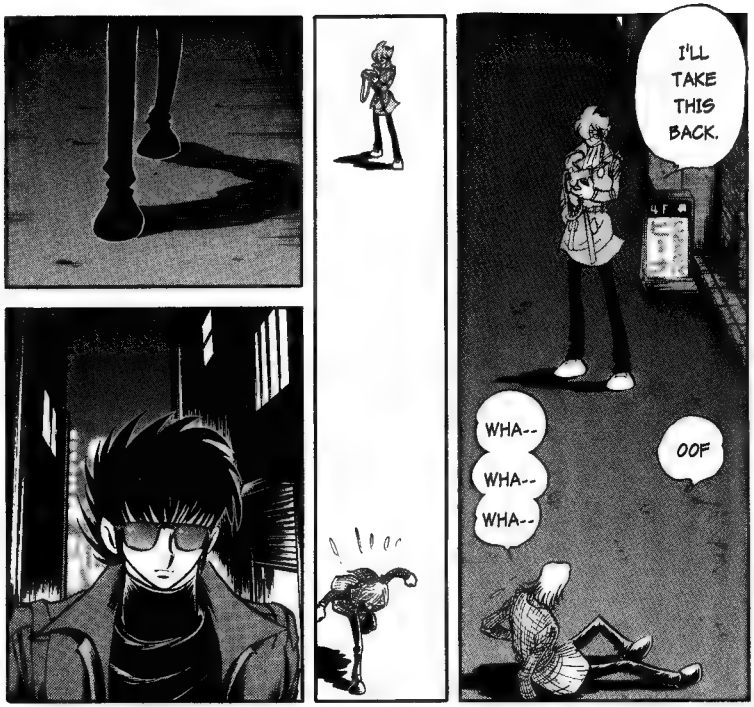
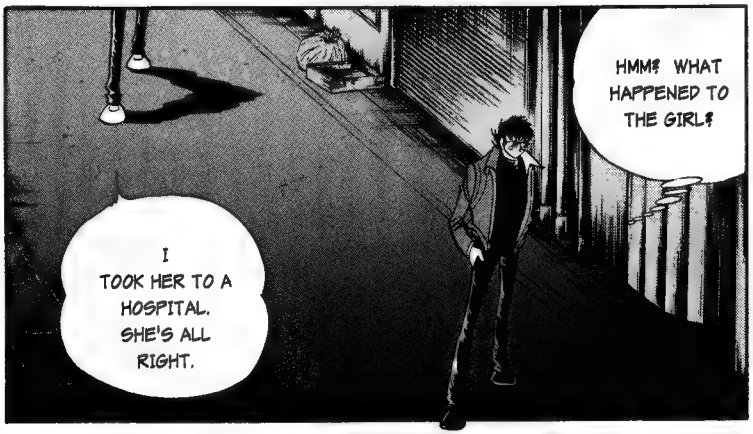
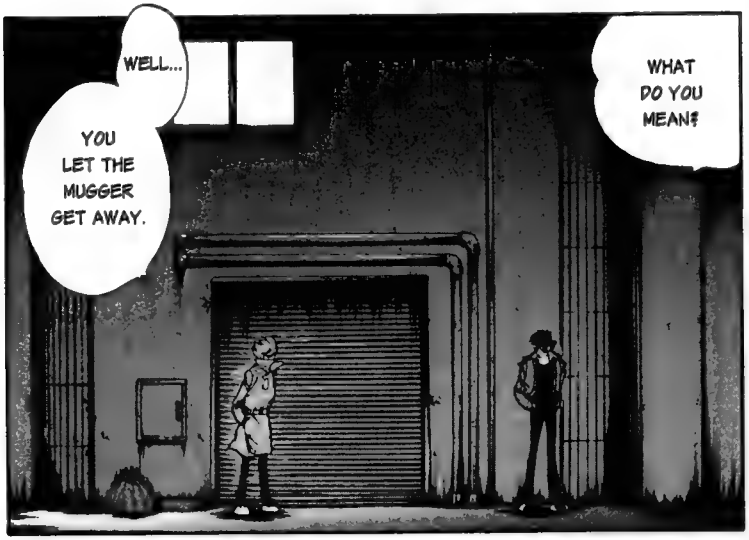
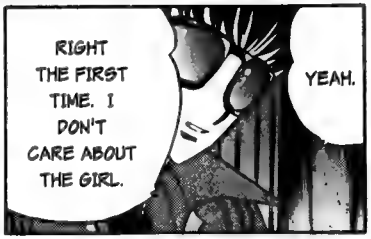
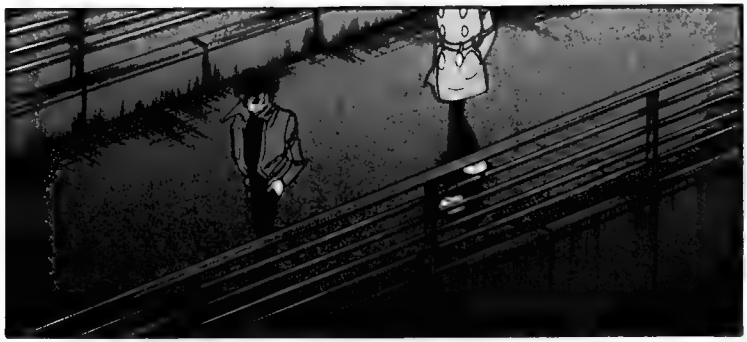

I'LL TAKE THIS BACK.
WHA--
WHA--
WHA--
OOF


HMM? WHAT HAPPENED TO THE GIRL?
I TOOK HER TO A HOSPITAL. SHE'S ALL RIGHT.


WELL...
YOU LET THE MUGGER GET AWAY.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

I SEE.


RIGHT THE FIRST TIME. I DON'T CARE ABOUT THE GIRL.
YEAH.



SHE'LL LIVE.

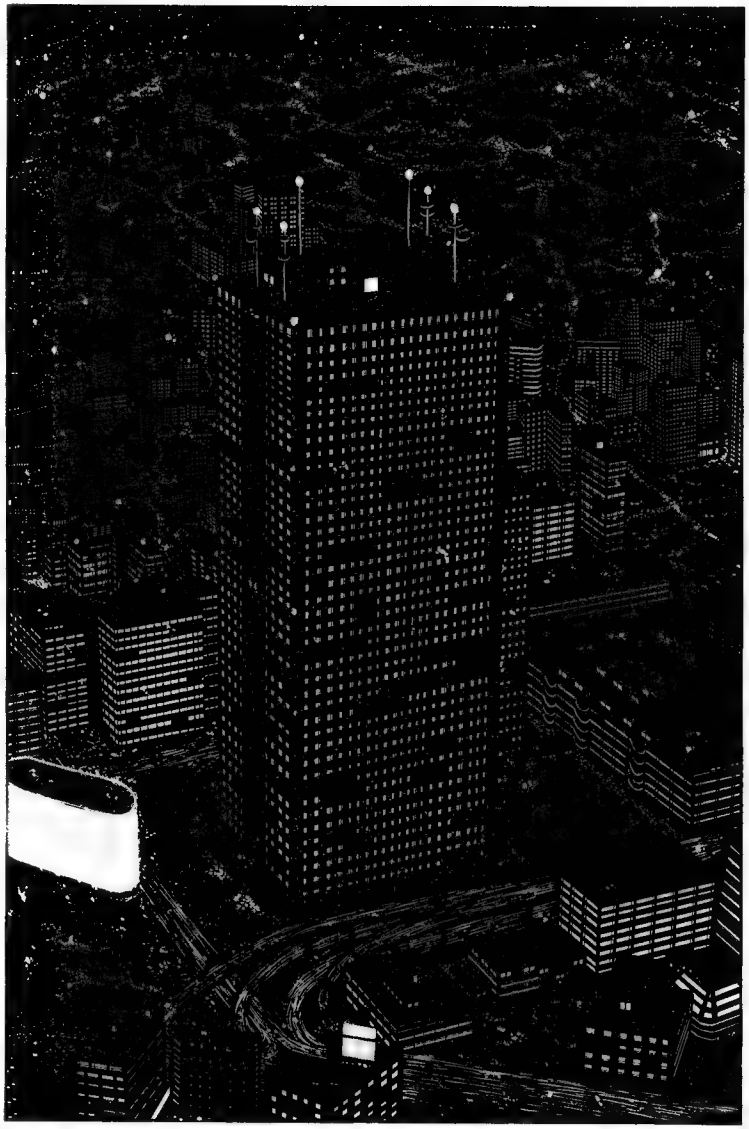
OR WERE YOU MORE CONCERNED FOR THE GIRL?
DIDN'T YOU CARE ABOUT THE MUGGER?

.....
...HOW ABOUT SOME COFFEE?
IF YOU'RE NOT BUSY...
AFTER ALL, THIS KIND OF THING DOESN'T HAPPEN EVERY DAY. PERHAPS YOU NEED A MOMENT TO SIT, COLLECT YOUR THOUGHTS.

YOUR COFFEE, SIR.

I'M NOT INTERESTED IN WHAT'S "HIDING IN THEIR SOULS."
THEY'RE NOT INSIDI-OUS.
THEY'RE MORE LIKE BUGS, CONTROLLED BY OUTSIDE FORCES THEY CAN'T EVEN BEGIN TO IMAGINE.
.....
THAT'S HOW I SEE IT.
THEY'RE DRAWN TO THE LIGHT.
THEY GATHER WHERE THERE'S FOOD. DRINK WHERE THERE IS WATER. AID ONE ANOTHER BUT ONLY IN SELF-INTEREST. THEY MAY SEEM TO HAVE FREE WILL, BUT THEY ARE CREATURES OF INSTINCT.
THOSE WHO CONTROL THE WORLD THEY LIVE IN, THEY HOLD THE DESTINY OF MANKIND AT THEIR FINGER-TIPS.

SOME MAY SEEM VIRTUOUS.
BUT EVIL BOILS BENEATH THEIR BENEVOLENT VISAGES.
SOME-THING MUST BE DONE.
THERE IS EVIL WITHIN EVERY SINGLE PERSON ON EARTH.
THIS EVIL ...
...IT HIDES IN THE DARK RECESSES OF THE SOUL.
IF THAT EVIL IS RELEASED...
...WELL, WE JUST HAVE TO ENSURE THAT IT NEVER IS RELEASED!
NOBODY IS ABSOLUTELY "GOOD."
IT CAN BE SO TINY.
SO TINY.
EVERYONE DOWN THERE ON THE STREET.



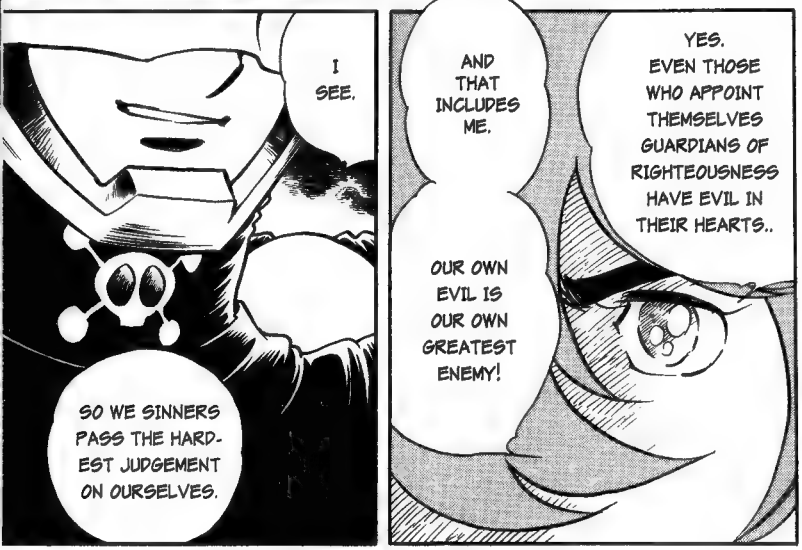
THEY DON'T REALIZE THAT THEIR "FREE WILL" IS JUST A DELUSION.
AND HUMANS DON'T KNOW IT. THEY'VE NO IDEA THAT LARGER FORCES EXIST.
ﾌｯﾄ…
THEY HAVEN'T A CLUE AS TO WHY THEY ARE HERE OR WHAT THEY SHOULD DO.
THEY'RE FOOLED INTO THINKING THAT THEIR CHOICES MAKE AN IMPACT.
YES...
ALWAYS.
BUT WHAT'S HIDDEN IS EXPOSED, EVENTUALLY.
I AGREE. PEOPLE OFTEN MISS THE BIGGER PICTURE.
ARE YOU SURE?

WELL, THEN...
...I WONDER IF YOU AREN'T THAT PERSON!
.....
I DON'T THINK I'VE BEEN CHOSEN.
BUT I AM PASSING JUDGEMENT.
.....
MY METHODS ARE QUESTIONABLE.
HMMM
THERE IS A GOD. AND SOMEDAY HE WILL CREATE AN AVENGING ANGEL TO PASS JUDGEMENT.
I BELIEVE THAT.
AND WHOEVER IS CHOSEN TO BECOME THIS ANGEL WILL HAVE A BITTER, MISERABLE JOB.

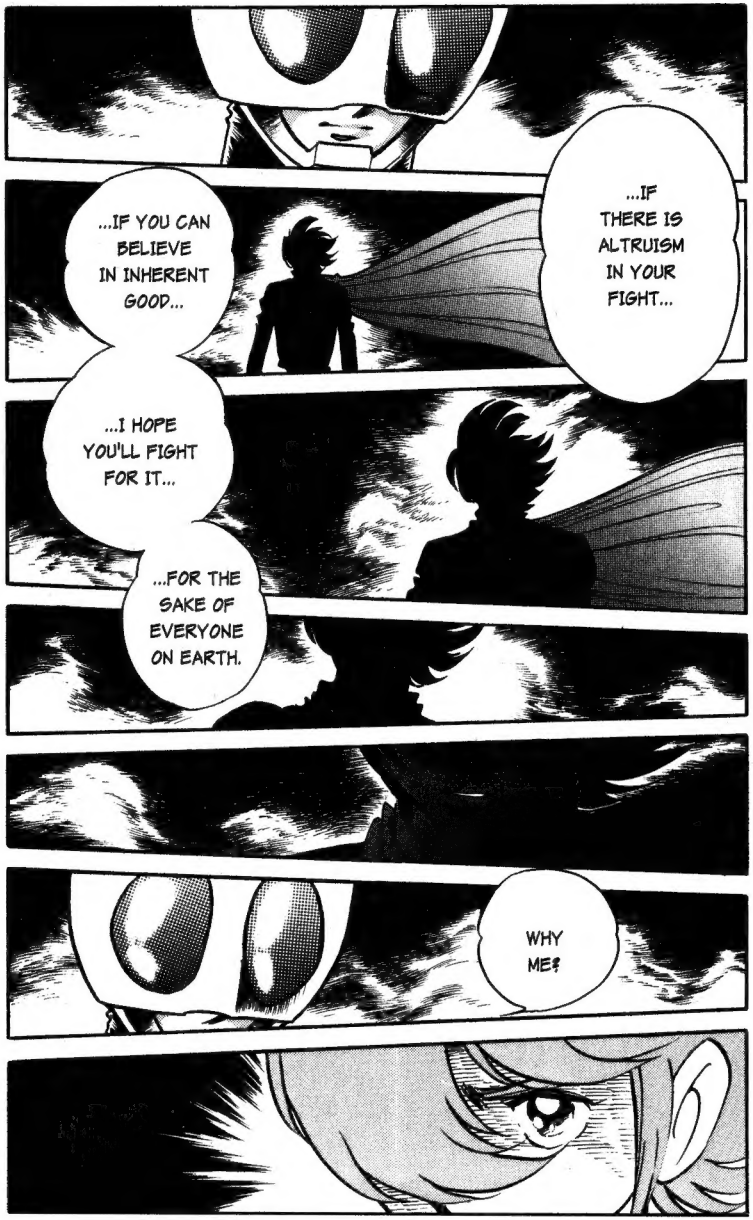
THIS TIME I'LL MAKE SURE I FINISH IT.
.....
TIME TO GO.
THANKS FOR THE COFFEE, PAL.
SEE YA.

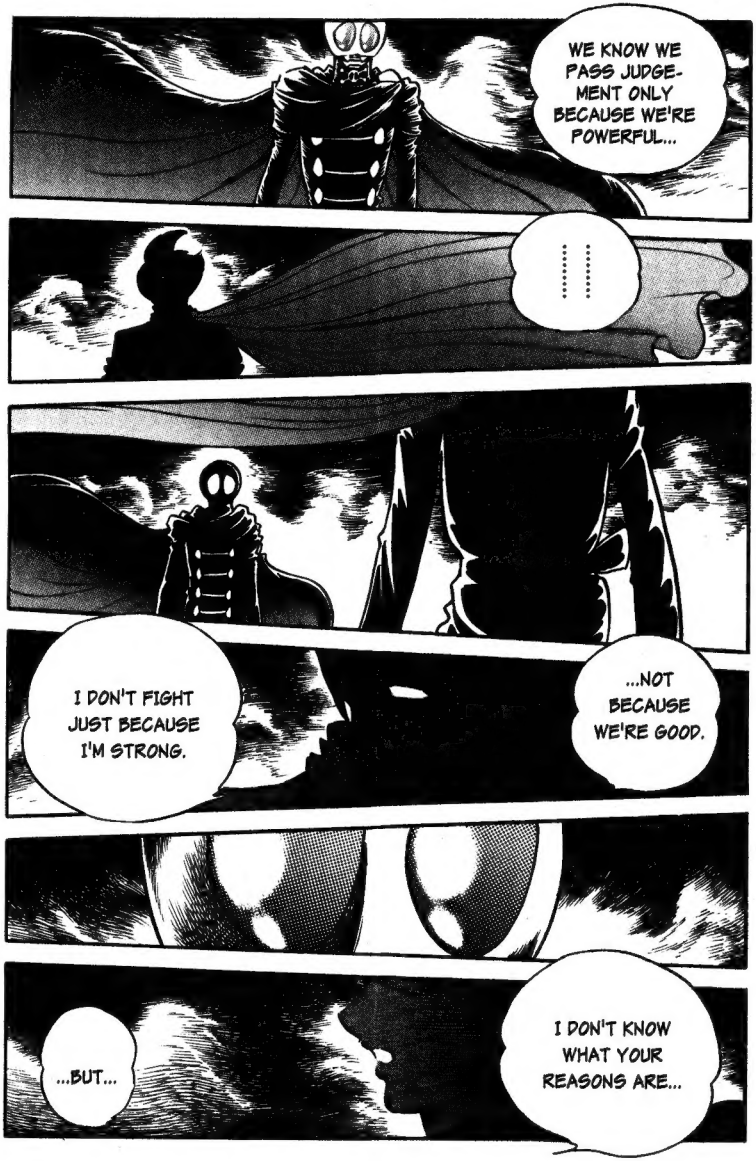
I WONDER WHAT PRICE I'LL HAVE TO PAY FOR MY SINS.
HOWEVER, I DON'T THINK SIMPLE MORAL ARGUMENTS ARE GOING TO CHANGE ME!
NEW PROBLEMS WILL LEAK FROM ANY UTOPIA. I HAVE ENOUGH TO WORRY ABOUT ALREADY.
BUT IT WILL ALL END SOMEDAY.
I WAS DENIED THE CHANCE TO END IT ONCE.

I WILL GIVE YOU STRENGTH TO RESIST AVARICE, OKAY?
WHO ARE YOU?
NAUGHTY! LAWMAKERS AND POLITICIANS LIKE YOU SHOULDN'T BE TEMPTED WITH PROMISES OF RICHES WHEN YOU HAVE THE TRUST OF SO MANY.
AH, AH!
WHO THE HELL?!


I SEE.
SO WE SINNERS PASS THE HARD-EST JUDGEMENT ON OURSELVES.
AND THAT INCLUDES ME.
OUR OWN EVIL IS OUR OWN GREATEST ENEMY!
YES. EVEN THOSE WHO APPOINT THEMSELVES GUARDIANS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS HAVE EVIL IN THEIR HEARTS..

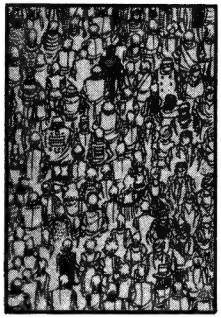
YOU?

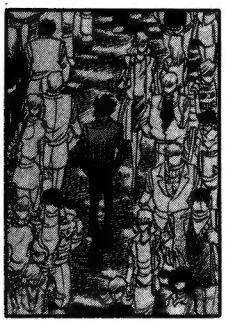

...IF THERE IS ALTRUISM IN YOUR FIGHT...
...IF YOU CAN BELIEVE IN INHERENT GOOD...
...I HOPE YOU'LL FIGHT FOR IT...
...FOR THE SAKE OF EVERYONE ON EARTH.
WHY ME?


WE KNOW WE PASS JUDGE-MENT ONLY BECAUSE WE'RE POWERFUL...
.....
I DON'T FIGHT JUST BECAUSE I'M STRONG.
...NOT BECAUSE WE'RE GOOD.
...BUT...
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOUR REASONS ARE...

BECAUSE YOU HAVE A HEAVY CROSS TO BEAR.

BECAUSE YOU WERE CHOSEN.





Preview for Skull Man Volume 6

Despite losing the loyalty of the Wasp and Chameleon armies, Rasputin, still has the upper hand. He has captured both Detective Hioka, a man still distrustful of the Skull Man, and Maria, the agent who has rebelled against his organization, and taken them to an undersea fortress. There he attempts to turn Hioka into a warrior-slave and forces Maria to reveal the Skull Man's secrets. Only their true moral character can save them, but what might Rasputin's efforts reveal about their true moral character? Back in Tokyo, the Skull Man faces yet another of Rasputin's mutagenic flock, the Vulture Man.

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